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WAVELL



WAVELL

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Fr.

WAVELL

By

R. H. KIERNAN

AUTHOR OF

"GENERAL SMUTS" "LAWRENCE OF ARABIA"

"THE UNVEILING OF ARABIA" ETC.

WITH SEVEN HALF-TONE ILLUSTRATIONS
AND SIX MAPS



GEORGE G. HARRAP & COMPANY LTD.
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TO A SERGEANT OF THE BLACK WATCH, SMALL, ACTIVE, TIRE-
LESS, AND COURAGEOUS, RECALLING FOR A YOUNG SOLDIER
THE FIGURE OF ALAN BRECK STEWART, ON THE BLACK NIGHT
OF A GERMAN RAID IN THE TRENCHES AT YPRES

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lectures in *Generals and Generalship* (Penguin Books, 1941), and lectures and articles in the *Journal of the Royal United Service Institution*. Particularly valuable also has been Philip Guedalla's *Middle East, 1940-1942: A Study in Air Power* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1944).

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R. H. K.

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CHAPTER I

WAVELLS

The medieval Wavells—The trial of a Wavell divine—Obdurate and insulted Mayors of Winchester—Wykehamists—Clerics, scholars, soldiers—A Fellow of the Royal Society

THE name Wavell is derived from Vauville, a place a few miles from Cherbourg. Seigneurs de Vauville, sometimes styled "Lords of the Seven Valleys," held land in Normandy and were apparently in frequent attendance on Duke William, the Conqueror, for their names can be seen as witnesses to his signature on various documents. They were a branch of the Barons of Briquebec, a family which can be traced back clearly through the Norsemen who settled in France, to Scandinavia and one Olaf the Sharp-eyed, King of Kerik.

Two de Vauvilles accompanied the Conqueror on his invasion of England, but though a de Vauville is mentioned as holding land in Domesday Book, the family seems not to have desired English manors as a share of the spoils of victory. Most of the references to the name in medieval documents indicate activities in Normandy, in the neighbourhood of Cherbourg and Bayeux, and the family was not permanently established in England until the thirteenth century.

About the year 1200 de Vauvilles are found holding land in Sussex, Bedfordshire, and Somerset, and appear for the first time in Hampshire in 1240, when Richard de Vauville was Prior of Ellingham. The names of laymen of the family appear in deeds granting lands and gifts to churches and monasteries. The de Vauvilles were represented in all the activities of the Middle Ages, as Members of Parliament,

freemen, knights, crusaders, priests, monks (one other attained ecclesiastical dignity as Prior of the Cluniacs at Wenlock), and as sheriffs, in which capacity there are documents recording their routine work of raising military levies, assessing and collecting taxes, taking measures against invasion in times of war, and pursuing criminals in an age when the post of sheriff was not, as now, an ornamental one. During these generations the name gradually became anglicized, under such forms as De Wayville, De Weyville, De Wauville, and De Wauvil, until by the fourteenth century, the "De" was being dropped and in 1478 a "Wavell" appears. He was a Scholar of Winchester College, the first of several such Scholars in Lord Wavell's lineage.

By this time the Wavells had been established for some three or four generations in the Isle of Wight, where Lord Wavell's branch of the family were landowners under the Tudors. One Wavell manor had belonged to the monastery at Christchurch, but as this Wavell bought it in the time of the Catholic Mary Tudor he was evidently not one of the original plunderers. However, by the reign of Elizabeth Wavells had adopted the new Church system, for one of the family was Vicar of Shorwell.

In the next century the army of Charles I contained a staunch Royalist in a Major Thomas Wavell. His son, Richard, was twelve years old when the Civil War ended, and the major, according to an old record, "bred him to be a scholar." In doing so he understood his son's temperament, but we do not know what the Royalist officer, who almost certainly would be a strong Churchman, thought of the opinions which Richard developed from his studies.

After graduating at Oxford in 1657, Richard Wavell studied Divinity under a Mr Rayner, of Egham, then assisted him in his church there, and married his stepdaughter. When the Act of Uniformity of 1662 enjoined on the clergy Anglican ordination, complete acceptance of the Prayer-

book, and an oath of non-resistance to the King, which was also applicable to teachers, Richard Wavell refused to conform. On what grounds his conscience forbade conformity is not clear; many of the ejected Dissenters were Presbyterians—and from the evidence of brief mentions of his sermons it would seem that Wavell was, at any rate, a Calvinist in doctrine. He was offered comfortable livings, yet would not conform. When a friend remonstrated with him, asking if he could live on his conscience alone, Wavell replied that a little, with a good conscience, would satisfy him. Like other Dissenting clergy, he tried to earn a living as a schoolmaster, but, as the old record says, “was so molested with Citations” that this means of supporting a growing family had to be abandoned. Then he preached privately in his own house at Egham to a small congregation which helped to support him. This was in breach of the Conventicle Act, and in view of warrants issued “against his body and goods” he had to cease preaching.

In due course Wavell became a regular pastor at Pinner’s Hall, and, at a time when the laws against Dissenters were being applied rigorously, knew that arrest was inevitable. He was, in fact, detained several times, but he told his congregations that “he would venture his person, if they would venture their purses.” They did so—at some expense in bail and fines. On one occasion he escaped the full penalties of the law through the favour of a kinsman, Sir Henry Tulse, Lord Mayor of London. An account of this affair was found in the pages of an old magazine, and was probably copied originally from the Nonconformist memorial, of Calamy and Palmer:

The title of gentleman being given to Mr Wavell in the indictment, one that sat upon the Bench said, he knew not why he should be called a gentleman. Sir Henry said, “He is a gentleman, and my kinsman too, and I have coveted his acquaintance; and respectfully blamed Mr Wavell for his

reservedness." Sir Henry so wisely ordered matters that during Mr Wavell's trial, the gentleman that was disposed to bear hardest on him was kept engaged in company, not expecting that the trial would come on so soon, and was not a little displeased when he found that the trial was over.

Sir Henry evidently saw his kinsman safely through this peril. His respect for Richard Wavell was shared by all who met him, and Dissenters long remembered his plain, fervent sermons, his complete trust in God, his pleasant conversation, and his kindnesses. He would give more than he could well afford in charity, and as he had ten children his friends would sometimes try to check him. "Mine will never want," Wavell would reply. "Their Heavenly Father will provide what is necessary, and more than that is hurtful." He seems to have been sincerely humble, grave, and austere in the fashion of old Dissenters, but less precise and more tolerant than most. Wavell's sufferings for conscience were not so prolonged as those of a more renowned preacher at Pinner's, John Bunyan, but he knew the inside of the gaols and the hard usage of the times. He died in his seventy-second year, and was buried in Bunhill Fields, off the City Road, in London, where his headstone can still be seen.

Richard's cousin, Thomas Wavell, of a branch of the family established in Winchester, was three times mayor of that city, the ancient capital of England. Thomas must have met Charles II, for during his periods of office the King was planning a Royal Palace at Winchester, as a refuge from the crowds and unquietness of Whitehall. He is notable, however, mainly for his resistance to James II. After Monmouth's Rebellion in 1685 the King demanded the surrender of the charters of many English cities, but Thomas Wavell would not hand over Winchester's. When the law officers of the Crown issued *Quo Warrantos* and Writs of Mandamus, the mayor replied that Winchester had committed no offence

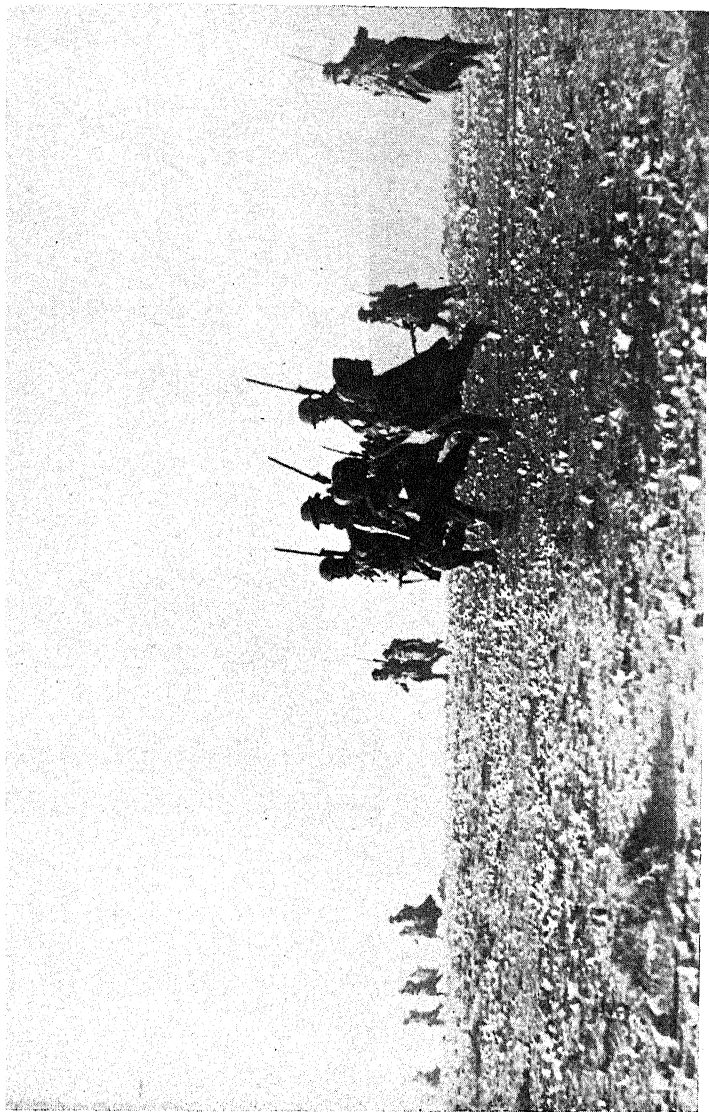
and that he refused to surrender the charter "until His Majesty could show legal cause and authority." The charter was not given up while he was mayor, but resistance seems to have depended on his personality, for when he relinquished office the citizens gave way. To their surprise, James returned the charter with a fresh confirmation, although this old city in its lovely valley, rich in tradition, had been the sole resister. London's charter was not returned until James had been deposed.

Thomas Wavell's two sons became mayors and freemen of Winchester in the next century. The city's records tell that one "Richard Leversuch, mason," was fined five marks and was made to apologize "in a most humble and prostrate manner" for a very rude approach to Gilbert Wavell, mayor, to whom he uttered "contumelious, opprobrious, and scandalous words." Of this incident Lord Wavell once remarked, "He must have 'said a mouthful,' and it sounds as if he got his five marks' worth!"

These Wavell dignitaries were educated at Winchester College. From the first century of its foundation, more than six hundred and fifty years ago, Wavells have attended this famous school. In the last few generations Lord Wavell and his son, his grandfather, and great-grandfather, were all Wykehamists.

The Wavells have been scholars, clerics, scientists, and soldiers. Two of them were rectors of the old Winchester church of St Maurice for half a century, and another was a canon of the cathedral. A William Wavell, surgeon, botanist, and geologist, who gave his name to a new mineral, wavellite, which he discovered in rock formations at Barnstaple, was a Fellow of the Royal Society. The soldiers of the family have usually been regimental officers, gallant, practical fighting men, though some attained to higher rank. Soldiers and civilians have contributed adequately to English life, in the manner of most families of like station, but in

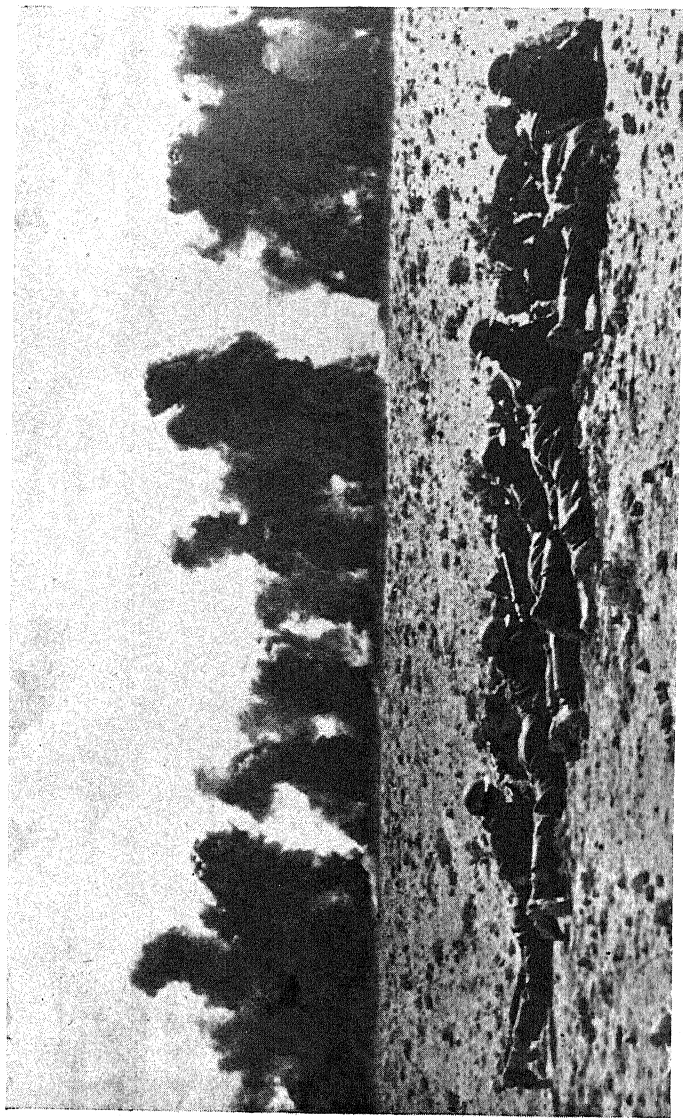
their long history the Wavells did not fail to produce men who lived adventurously outside the traditional forms of service. Of these, two were uncommon personalities whose paths of adventure lay as far apart as Arabia and Spanish America.



AUSTRALIANS ATTACK AT BARDIA

[See page 142.]

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BRITISH INFANTRY TAKE COVER FROM ENEMY SHELLS IN THE WESTERN DESERT

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CHAPTER II

SPAIN TO MEXICO

A volunteer in Spain—Barrosa—Siege of Tarragona—Sarsfield—Wavell's special missions—Dispatches from Wellington—Fights at Ateca and Calayatud—Staff-work at Cadiz—The great embarkation at Vinaroz—The Duc d'Angoulême—The praise of Spanish soldiers—Liberty in America—Chilean Army of Independence—In Mexico—Wavell and Stephen F. Austin—Pirates off Cuba—Wavell's work for Mexico—A grant of land in Texas—Arthur Goodall Wavell's family

ARTHUR GOODALL WAVELL was the son of Dr William Wavell, the discoverer of wavellite. For most of his active career the doctor practised in Devon, but during his son's infancy he was living in Gracechurch Street, London, and the baptism took place at St Benet, which in 1785 stood at the corner of Gracechurch Street and Fenchurch Street. In 1798 Arthur Goodall Wavell entered Winchester College as a Scholar of the Foundation and remained there for six years.

On leaving school he was nominated to a cadetship in the British forces in India, was commissioned a few months later, and must have shown a considerable aptitude for military administration, for he became adjutant of a Corps on the Bengal Establishment although he was in the East less than three years. In 1808 he returned to England in ill-health.

Napoleon was then at the zenith of his power. All the great nations of the Continent had been vanquished, and most of the seaboard of Europe could be controlled by the French. Yet Great Britain through all the years of war from 1793 remained unsubdued. Napoleon decided to break England by closing Europe to her trade, and as Portugal

was a gateway to that trade, she was attacked. The British intervened in support of their ancient ally, but their first successes might well have been ephemeral had not Napoleon also challenged the Spanish people, mainly by removing the Bourbon ruling house, and introducing his brother, Joseph, as king.

Hitler's attack on Russia suggests an obvious parallel with Napoleon's disastrous Moscow campaign of 1812. Yet there is a closer similarity between Hitler's invasion of Russia and Napoleon's Spanish venture. In Russia the Germans suffered the first vast drainage of strength, as did the French in Spain; the German campaign in Russia presented great problems of supply, as did the French campaign in the Peninsula; the two struggles were alike in duration and in their national character. Both invasions marked the beginning of the end of attempts at European domination.

In Spain, Napoleon entered a land "where large armies starve and small armies are beaten," and where national feeling burned just as fiercely as among Napoleon's finest troops. The Spanish people would not even consider the benefits which a French "New Order" might well have brought them, for the spirit of no considerable nation in Europe, except the Polish, was less concerned with material things. With their king in exile, the administration, which had revolved round the Crown, in disorder, the Spanish resisted, captured a large French force, formed provincial *juntas* to organize government and war, and set up a form of central control at Cadiz.

With only seventy thousand men, Regulars and militia, the Spanish began a five years' war against the greatest army on the Continent. A British force of twenty-six thousand men under Wellington, with an equal number of British-trained Portuguese, was allotted to keep this fire of freedom burning.

These events occurred during Wavell's illness. A love of

liberty which marked his whole career was stirred by Spanish resistance. The prospect of joining in Spain's defence may have aided his recovery; and meanwhile he occupied his active, restless mind by learning Spanish. During the period of his illness and convalescence the British had defeated the French at Vimiero, Portugal was freed, Sir John Moore's campaign of Corunna had dislocated French plans for Spain, and Wellington had won the battle of Talavera. The initiative, however, still remained with the French, for Napoleon began to roll corps after corps into the Peninsula. Wellington fell back into the Lines of Torres Vedras with his back to the Atlantic, and Cadiz was besieged by the French under Victor. In 1810 the critical period of the war was still ahead.

In that year the tall, slim, enthusiastic young Wavell arrived at Cadiz as a volunteer for the Spanish Army. Early in the next year the beleaguered city sent a force by sea to Tarifa, a small old, Moorish town held by the British on the farthest southerly point of the Peninsula. The plan was to march inland from Tarifa, attack the besiegers of Cadiz, and free the city. Wavell served on the staff of this expedition. The Spanish defeated a French force, but the main action was fought by four thousand British under a gallant old officer, Major-General Sir Thomas Graham, against seven thousand French under Marshal Victor. It was a hard tussle, in which Victor had the advantage of position on the heights of Barrosa, but it was the French who retreated, leaving two thousand dead, six cannon and an Eagle—the first that the British had captured. Of the British more than a quarter were killed. But the siege of Cadiz was not raised.

In this deadly, but brilliantly conducted, small action Wavell received a wound in the arm from which he suffered afterwards for many years. Wavell no doubt observed the distinguished conduct of the 37th Foot in this battle, and its splendid record in subsequent operations, by which it

won nine honours in the Peninsular War. Two generations later the scarlet coat of the Hampshires was the first uniform to be worn by the most illustrious of his descendants.

The British regard the Peninsular War with justifiable pride for the extremes of courage and mighty deeds of arms displayed by Wellington's army, but the history text-books invariably confine attention to the British battles, and neglect the great contribution of the Spanish forces. It is true that many of the Spanish leaders were incompetent and jealous of one another, and that the regular armies of Spain were beaten by the French in open battle—as were all other armies, from the Borodino to the Scheldt. Nevertheless, these defeated armies of Spain were constantly reorganized, so that they pinned down great numbers of the French who would otherwise have been employed against the British. Above all, it was the *guerrilleros* of Spain and Spanish Regulars used on irregular lines that wore down the numbers and the courage of the French. The silent, tigerish men from the bare *sierras*, descending on the long French lines of communication, ambushing all but the strongest columns, despoiling wagons and depots, drew more and more troops from the battle zones, engulfed French resources, and drained the strength and nerve from the invaders. In five years the French lost forty-five thousand men in pitched battles with Wellington; yet their total casualties were at least 500,000. More Frenchmen died at the hands of the Spaniards (and British in irregular fighting), and in sieges of points held by the Spanish, than in the battles whose names appear in school books. Sir John Fortescue has said that the real heroes of the war were the Spanish.

In 1810 the French had three hundred thousand men in Spain. Of these sixty thousand were employed against the fifty thousand British and Portuguese. The rest were fighting the Spanish Regulars and guerrillas elsewhere, as in Aragon and Catalonia, where sixty thousand French were

constantly occupied by a few thousand Spanish. It was to this theatre of war that Wavell came, two months after the battle of Barrosa, as a volunteer in the defence of Tarragona.

The tall, slim young man with the serious face, and an arm in a sling, heard the people of the town singing a chorus which had been brought by Andalusians from Cadiz :

Con las bombas que tiran
los fanfarrones,
Se hacen las españolas
tirabuzones.

(" With the bombs they throw, the braggarts, the Spanish women make corkscrews.")

Tarragona had some natural advantages for defence, and the British could land supplies and arms from the sea. Its varied defensive works were, however, for the most part ill-prepared or neglected. The Marquis of Campo Verde commanded the town, and directing operations in this area was one of the ablest French soldiers, Suchet.

Outside Tarragona General Don Pedro Sarsfield was harassing Suchet's communications, threatening his depots, and thus drawing off troops who could have been used in the assault. Wavell was employed as Chief Engineer in an advanced post called the Olivo. This was a large work on the north of the town, on a rocky table-land, separated from the upper town by a ravine, across which stretched a double aqueduct. It was garrisoned by some two thousand men, and held fifty cannon.

The French attacked and forced a breach in the defences, but it was only after sixteen days of desperate fighting that the post was occupied. The garrison fought on after the French had broken in, and there was great slaughter, some twelve hundred Spaniards being killed and hundreds made prisoners. Wavell survived this assault and went as second-in-command to a large redoubt called the Francoli, on the west of the town near the mouth of the river Francoli. This

post was intended to ensure the water-supply, should the French cut the aqueducts. After the fall of the Olivo Sarsfield came into Tarragona, Campo Verde went to the Spanish forces in the field, and command of the town was taken over by De Contreras.

The Francoli resisted all French attacks with desperate courage. French saps were raided and destroyed. French gunners were sniped as they served their pieces. Wavell repaired breaches, led raids, and kept in touch with British naval forces off the port. At length Sarsfield took him on his Staff for the defence of the Marina, or lower town. Here Wavell helped to check various French assaults and took part in a sortie led by Sarsfield personally. The Spanish rank and file displayed the heroic spirit, but many of their officers were unworthy of the men. Some colonels 'went sick,' others simply ran away. Contreras was weak and changeable, would not work smoothly with Campo Verde, and was jealous of Sarsfield.

At the climax of the siege, when, despite sallies, raids, and the fiercest defence, breaches lay open and a French assault was expected at any moment, Contreras informed Sarsfield that orders had come for him to embark at once and join the Spanish forces outside. Campo Verde had, in fact, sent for Sarsfield, but Contreras represented the order, falsely, as being peremptory. Sarsfield remonstrated but had to obey.

A boat from the *Cambrian* frigate came in for Sarsfield and his personal Staff. On the same day Tarragona fell, amid scenes of fire and great carnage. The French respected the hospitals, but elsewhere showed vicious cruelty. The British warships had evacuated large numbers from the town, but five thousand people were slain, and a wide area of the town was burned. The French paid for the capture of Tarragona with four or five thousand men, counting killed alone.

For his services in the defence Wavell was given the rank

of lieutenant-colonel, and his commission is dated from the siege. It seems that he left Tarragona with Sarsfield; certainly he was with him shortly afterwards in the interior of Catalonia.

There were high officers of the Spanish Army who seemed to stand apart from the tradition of their country in their lack of manliness and honour. After Barrosa some of them tried to place the blame for opportunities they had missed on Sir Thomas Graham. That old soldier, however, was quite competent to deal with men of their type. After Tarragona Contreras reported to the Spanish authorities, and to Captain Codrington, commanding British naval forces, that Sarsfield had betrayed his post, leaving Tarragona without his consent!

The most heroic efforts of the Spanish people were often frustrated by such men. Moreover, until 1812 the assembly at Cadiz neglected the military operations and busied itself with the preparations of a new Constitution. This assembly consisted mainly of liberals, drawn from the maritime districts which had not at the beginning been occupied by the French. It did not represent Spanish opinion, and its Constitution was utterly unpractical, although it was to be hailed afterwards as the ultimate ideal by liberal movements in other countries. Meanwhile, in the period of its gestation, the Spanish War was left to conduct itself, and too many feeble commanders remained with the unfortunate army. The British Command, under a realist, soon recognized the trustworthy elements among the Spanish leaders, and Sarsfield won its confidence. There is an official note to Wellington, dated five weeks after the fall of Tarragona, referring apparently to the Spanish Regulars in Catalonia. It states that "the only division that keeps together in any tolerable order is that of General Sarsfield, of about two thousand men."

Barcelona, the chief port of Catalonia, was held by the

French, but the Spanish kept the invaders well occupied, and British warships lay off the coast. In August 1811 Wavell undertook a special mission for Captain Buck, of the *Franchise* frigate, who was commanding naval units blockading the harbour. Landing at midnight with some men from the frigate, he detected a number of traitors who were corresponding with the enemy. They were afterwards executed. On another night, with a party in boats, he sailed close to the Mole, intercepting and capturing some vessels which had crept along the coast, trying to take supplies to the French garrison.

With an army of one hundred thousand men, less than half of which was British, Wellington in 1812 stormed Ciudad Rodrigo and Badajoz, defeated Marmont at Salamanca, and occupied Madrid for a time before falling back towards the Portuguese frontier. During these operations the Spanish were engaging or neutralizing ninety thousand French, who might have been at Salamanca or with Napoleon on his Moscow campaign—his second blunder on the grand scale. Wavell was not employed in the fighting in these months. His duties involved the translation of confidential papers for Sarsfield, the Junta of Catalonia, and for various generals and officials, and liaison work between the Spanish Army and British forces on the south coast of Spain.

In that summer he was sent to Cadiz, where he translated secret dispatches from Wellington to the Spanish Council. Wellington, who had known him as a child, held Wavell in the highest esteem as a soldier and as a loyal and disinterested man. He was well aware that Wavell's presence in Spain owed nothing to love of war for itself or to personal ambition, and that the championship of liberty against tyranny was an overmastering motive in the man. At Cadiz Wavell doubtless followed the fortunes of Sarsfield and other Spanish leaders who, to use Napier's word, were "infesting" Aragon and Catalonia—which contained Suchet's

principal arsenals and depots—to such effect that of seventy thousand French in the two provinces, only twenty thousand could be used for operations in the field. The remainder was tied to a defensive role on the lines of communication and in guarding bases.

In the first months of 1813, the year of the French defeats at Vittoria and Leipsig, Wavell was again with Sarsfield in Aragon. Sarsfield writes of him:

Among Wavell's distinguished services, I must refer to the action at Ateca, in Aragon, on the 14th of February, 1813, in which he took part.

He was the bearer of my Orders to a body of German Lancers, who were to charge enemy infantry which was forming at the front. Notwithstanding his disabled arm, the result of a wound he received at the battle of Barrosa, after he had communicated the said Orders, he placed himself at the head of the squadron with its Commander, and courageously charged the enemy, thus furnishing by this means and his example, a day of glory to the Arms of the King.

On the following day, a dozen miles farther east, Wavell led some of Sarsfield's troops in an attack on the town of Calayatud, a town second only to Saragossa, in Aragon, and drove out the Division of Serboli "with precipitation." Sarsfield continues:

By his conduct in Aragon, Wavell gained a Military Cross of the Order of St Ferdinand, and has equally distinguished himself on every occasion during the long period he has acted on my Staff. His Zeal and Talents have constantly rendered him of the most essential service, more particularly as he has been so often employed by myself and other General Officers and authorities in keeping up the communications between the Spanish and British Military and Naval forces. In the many arduous and important affairs in which he has been engaged, his conduct has ever been such as to entitle him to the highest approbation and esteem.

Sarsfield sent Wavell from Valencia to Cadiz in May 1813 with important dispatches describing, to use Wavell's own words, "the deplorable situation in that province." The provincial Junta of Valencia recommended the removal of many abuses and the punishment of some men holding high military employment, "whose misconduct rendered the existence of the Regular Army in that province impracticable."

When Sarsfield, now a Field-Marshal, was appointed to command a strong division which was to co-operate in diversionary operations on the east coast of Spain with British forces under Lord William Bentinck he sent at once for Wavell, who returned to Valencia and served at the siege of Sagunto—a place famous for its resistance to Hannibal, and now held by the French—one of Suchet's most valuable arsenals. At the request of the British, Sarsfield's Division was after some weeks moved to Tarragona. Of this period the Spanish General Sans y Barutell writes :

As Second General I commanded a Brigade under the Command of Field-Marshal Don Pedro Sarsfield, and in the Division there served, with the rank of Adjutant to Sarsfield, Lieutenant-Colonel Don Arthur Wavell, who was in the blockade of Sagunto and afterwards in that of Tarragona, to which place our Division was transferred at the request of His Excellency Lord Bentinck, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army in Catalonia, in order to reinforce it, because of the very superior enemy forces, under Marshal Suchet, which threatened him.

Sarsfield was anxious to co-operate efficiently with the British. Aware and regretful of some of the experiences which the British had suffered in operations with other Spanish generals, he was resolved that this time there should be no failure on the Spanish part. Barutell continues :

* In order to make sure of the embarkation of our Division from the beaches of Vinaroz, in the province of Valencia,

Sarsfield commissioned Wavell, who (in spite of being ill, and his right arm almost crippled) proceeded with so much activity that he procured the embarkation of all the troops in less than twenty-four hours, and passed with them to the blockade of Tarragona.

Wavell embarked nearly seven thousand men, who had never before been on board a ship, from an open beach, in heavy surf! Sarsfield wrote:

The excessive fatigue and exposure Wavell suffered in the embarkation of my Division, which, agreeable with Lord Bentinck's request I was anxious to execute with all possible rapidity, increased an illness under which he had long laboured to such an alarming degree that, after a few days spent at Tarragona, where he was of essential service to me in preparing and correcting a plan of that place which he had made in 1811, I felt myself under the disagreeable necessity of depriving myself of his services, though at that period they were more than ever necessary to me, on account of my junction with the British Army. Notwithstanding Wavell's reluctance, I insisted on his returning to England for the recovery of his health, he having long since been deprived of the use of his right arm, owing originally to a violent contusion which he had received at Barrosa.

The war in Catalonia was almost ended. After Wellington's victory at Vittoria in June Suchet had to abandon the eastern provinces and retire towards the French frontier. Wavell reached England in September and was for some time so ill that he was not expected to recover. Two years later, however, he was in Spain again, on the Staff of the Army of Catalonia. When Napoleon escaped from Elba the Duc d'Angoulême passed through northern Catalonia on his way to Bordeaux, where he hoped to organize resistance. Wavell was attached to his Staff for a time, and so had the honour of serving the last of the Dauphins. Angoulême failed, but was later to show that he remembered the Englishman.

Promoted colonel in 1817, after six and a half years' service, Wavell soon afterwards resigned his commission in the Spanish Armies. He had been awarded the Military Order of San Fernando, the Cross of Distinction and the Order of Charles III. In Spain, through these Orders, he held the rank of Knight. In 1818 Angoulême recommended Wavell to the British Government for recognition deserved both for his efforts in the cause of Spanish independence and for services to the Duke personally. It was then considered whether or not a British knighthood could be conferred on Wavell, as knighthoods had been conferred on others who had won foreign Orders of that rank. The Government finally decided that Wavell could not be knighted as he was not a General Officer. His appointment to a Consulate was also considered, but it was not found possible to offer him one at the time. However, by Royal Licence, he was allowed to wear the decorations which he had earned.

The Spanish loaded him with certificates of praise, bearing such distinguished names as those of Don Francisco Josef Barnaldo de Quiros, Lieutenant-General of the Royal Armies, Don Jose de Santa Cruz, Brigadier of the Royal Armies, and Don Esteban Pages, Commander of the Royal Armies. Among the first to write tributes to Wavell were two of the professional soldiers of Irish descent who were found in all the armies of eighteenth-century Europe. These were tributes which Wavell must have valued highly, as the testimony of excellent soldiers to his honour, personal courage, and technical efficiency. They were written by Field-Marshal Don Pedro Sarsfield and Lieutenant-General Don Charles William Doyle.

After the war the Spanish people greeted the return of the king with enthusiasm, for there was a profound reverence for monarchy as an institution. But the king proved unworthy of respect, and Spain was hampered by small groups

of ineffective liberals and intellectuals, who were of too much consequence in a country mainly illiterate. In their theories, constitutions, and *pronunciamentos* they were more incompetent than the king. Spain was, moreover, treated with contempt by the nations which had been saved by her and by Britain; and in a few years a French army, following a plan suggested perhaps by Wellington, was marching into the Peninsula!

A stupid king and the puny liberals could not supply the long period of stability which Spain, then as now, needed for a colossal reconstruction. States in South and Central America, which might have welcomed a democratic monarchy, were tired of repression and injustice, and lost all confidence in the central government of the Spanish Empire. They revolted, claiming their independence.

Wavell watched the early struggles of Chile with sympathy. He had not sought knighthood, and even while his appointment to a consulate was being considered he had probably decided to go to South America, for he had faith in a great future for the Spanish American states. As the Chilean Ambassador said in 1943, "His far-seeing conception of the independence of the New World drew him towards the ideal of Bolivar—that of the unity and political co-operation of all nations of the hemisphere."

In 1819 he was in Buenos Aires, working out a plan for the defence of the city, and at another time planning operations to meet an Indian threat to the capital. Then he got into touch with San Martin, who had fought in the Peninsular War, had recently won the battle of Maypu, decisive for Chilean independence, and was now preparing an expedition against Peru, the stronghold of Spanish power in South America. San Martin's collaborator, Bernardo O'Higgins, enrolled him in the Chilean Army of Independence as a Colonel of Infantry. The Army had sufficient fighting men, but needed officers with the wider knowledge of

organization, administration, training, and supply, so that Wavell was rapidly promoted, and in a few months became Deputy Commander-in-Chief. Lord Cochrane defeated the Spanish at sea, and San Martin occupied Lima. Chilean independence was assured, and Wavell's chief object now was to open economic and political relations between the new State and Great Britain, and to extend relations with all the peoples of Spanish America.

Wavell's enthusiasm for the future of the South American states and for their co-operation with Britain was no hidden passion, for he was a witness to the fact that a man of action can also be fluent in speech and a facile writer. From his pen came memoranda and treatises on many subjects, in English and Spanish, but mainly in Spanish. His energy and obvious sincerity convinced O'Higgins that Wavell should go as Delegate of Chile to Mexico, which was on the eve of establishing her independence.

The Mexican separatists at once recognized that Wavell was no politician, or intriguer, or even plain soldier of fortune, but judged him a brother to all men who loved liberty, and persuaded him to join the Mexican Army of Independence, with the rank of Brigadier-General. The tall, soldierly Englishman, with the serious face and an almost useless arm, wearing on his tunic the Orders of old Spain, attracted the attention of the crowds when he rode into Mexico City among the staff of the victorious Iturbide. He was now given the task of organizing and training Mexican forces, and wrote in Spanish a treatise on cavalry tactics.

War was not his sole interest, and perhaps not his chief interest. Natural history, the resources of nature, mineralogy, and fossils, all occupied his mind; and that his attention to them was not *dilettante* is shown by his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society. He wrote treatises on mines, highways, and colonization, and compiled an exhaustive description of the productivity of Mexico, for the benefit of the

British Government. During the years of the unquiet birth of this restless state he envisaged Britain's commerce and political influence extending to the vast Empire which Spain had lost.

At that time Texas was a part of Mexico. But for Wavell it might never have become independent—though this was not his object, and perhaps not until just before he left Mexico could he have foreseen the possibility of a “Lone Star” state. One of the first men he met in Mexico was Stephen F. Austin, who had made the hard journey overland to obtain from the new Government a ratification of land for colonization by English-speaking people. Wavell told the story of their contacts years later:

Acquainted with no Mexican of any influence, and only most imperfectly with the Spanish language, and scantily provided with funds, as he informed me, Austin had made no progress whatsoever. Perceiving that circumstances brought me into constant communication with the Mexican authorities, Austin called on me, stating his case most fully, and requested my aid.

Finding him a man of intellect and energy, well calculated to rescue a fine country from desolation and barbarous Indians, who thus would no longer be able to plunder the Mexicans resident in Coahuila, I resolved to render him all the assistance in my power. After a very short acquaintance Austin remained in my house for some months, when I left Mexico for London.

Wavell was sent to London as Special Envoy of the Mexican Government, to obtain recognition for the new Mexican Republic. He continues:

The exertions made during these months obviated every difficulty for Austin, except want of funds to remain in Mexico. I left him with a sufficient sum for that purpose as he informed me that his co-partner stated his inability to supply him from New Orleans.

The amount of money supplied by Wavell is not known; nor do we know that it was repaid, either by Austin or later

Texan Governments. As a personal loan, of course, no record of repayment may have been kept by either man. What is certain, however, is that Austin would have 'got nowhere' but for Wavell's influence and assistance.

On the voyage to England Wavell's ship, the French brig *L'Azema*, of Bordeaux, was boarded by pirates off Cuba, and Wavell lost all his belongings. In London he conducted an enthusiastic propaganda in political, financial, and scientific circles, urging the vast opportunities for British activity in Mexico. From the financiers he raised £20,000 for Austin's colonization project.

After his return to Mexico he was engaged on various plans for the development of roads, mines, and colonies. Many of the original pioneers of Texas were introduced by him, including Richard Ellis, who was to be the President of the Convention which declared Texas independent. By Mexican politicians he was regarded as one above self-seeking or corruption, and his schemes, even if neglected, were at least regarded as disinterested. Wavell wanted to see the country at peace and prosperous, and hoped that Britain would share in the development, and in the good fortune promised by the land's natural riches. He was always alert for the efforts of other nations to gain an influence which might be Britain's.

The Mexican Government granted him land in Texas, some five million acres near the Red river, on condition that it was colonized by a stated number of settlers. Wavell hoped to introduce English, Irish, and Scots, and provide them with schools and churches, but when he finally left Mexico in 1833 the grant of territory lapsed, as the requisite number of colonists had not been found. Although Texas became an independent state, Wavell hoped to establish a colony there and approached the British Government to take up his case. The Crown lawyers considered that it would fail, and to a final letter refusing support, the Foreign

Secretary, Lord Aberdeen, who was a personal friend, added the advice: "Think no more about it. Dedicate yourself to fish for trout, and sip your Port, without disdaining sometimes to mix it with Sherry, especially after soup."

It was not bad advice to one who had packed so much action and administrative work into the years between 1810 and 1833. Eight years before his return from Mexico he had married Anne Paxton, seventeen years younger than himself, a daughter of Sir William Paxton, of Middleton Hall, Carmarthen. They had four sons and six daughters. Arthur Goodall Wavell died in 1860, at 43 Ladbroke Street, Notting Hill, and was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery. His wife survived him by many years, dying at the age of eighty. They were a long-lived family, for the average age of father, mother, and ten children was over sixty-nine years; and if three who died about middle age are excluded the average age would be seventy-seven and a half years.

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CHAPTER III

A WAVELL IN ARABIA

A Mutiny hero—A. J. B. Wavell—Service in South Africa—Journeys from the War Office—A gifted subaltern—In East Africa—Plans visit to the Holy Cities—The Hejaz Railway—Fighting at Medina-Saad, the Bedouin—Yanbo and Jidda—At Mecca—An impression of Wavell—Wavell on the Turks—Tricks Hodeida officials—Siege of Sanaa—"Wavell's Arabs"—An East African skirmish

ARTHUR GOODALL WAVELL'S third son, Llewellyn, of Somborne, Farnborough, in Hampshire, served in the First European Bengal Fusiliers throughout the Indian Mutiny, and in later wars in China and Afghanistan. At eighteen, an ensign in rank, he led a storming party when the gate of Delhi was blown in. There was a narrow lane at the head of which the Sepoys had placed a battery of artillery, causing great carnage among the British infantry. But they advanced again and again until they had captured the guns. One of Llewellyn Wavell's comrades, named Woodcock, had been wounded, and tells this story in an old record of the Mutiny:

It was here that I fell, and, strange to say, the feeling I experienced was one of rage at being killed, for I was bleeding much. Just then that young lad Wavell came up, and behaved like a brave fellow, for he lifted me up, and though the grape and bullets were flying around us so thickly that I entreated him to leave me to die (believing myself mortally wounded), yet he never for an instant hesitated, but got me to a place of safety.

On the occasion of Wavell's marriage Woodcock wrote to him, "As long as I live and have my memory and senses, I shall remember your gallant conduct towards me in the lane

by the Cabul Gate." Llewellyn Wavell, one of whose chief characteristics was a great love of children, lost his two sons in childhood in India. The love which he would have bestowed on them was turned towards the soldiers, who in those days had few to take an interest in them. "The soldier is a right good fellow," he used to say, "and it was in times of trouble and hardships, every man's life in his hands, I first learned to love and appreciate him as he deserves." For the last twenty-seven years of a long life he worked for the soldiers' welfare and was particularly connected with the development of the Church of England Soldiers' Institutes. The Wavell Memorial Chapel, attached to the Church of England Soldiers' Institute, Marlborough Lines, North Camp, at Aldershot, was named in memory of Llewellyn Wavell.

A long letter from Arthur Goodall Wavell appeared in 1855 in the *Morning Advertiser* urging the use of the low-trajectory fire of gun-rafts in the Crimea. His eldest son, Arthur Henry, was serving against the Russians there, and later saw campaigning in Africa. He married a Miss Byng, a descendant of the Admiral Byng who was shot in 1757, and is immortalized in Voltaire's ironic *mot*.

Their eldest son, Arthur John Wavell, born in 1882, was educated at Winchester, proceeded to Sandhurst, and was appointed to the 1st Battalion, the Welch Regiment, the old 41st of the Line, in which his father had served in the Crimea. In 1900 he sailed to the South African War, and, like his father, was on active service at the age of eighteen.

In appearance he was slight, dark, and frail, and, even after years of soldiering and more perilous occupations, was shy and silent. Yet his appearance and manner belied the man. With close comrades he was a joyous, witty talker, and physically he was hardy and of a restless energy plainly inherited from his grandfather. Routine wearied him; he liked to play a lone hand, especially with danger. That he

differed from his grandfather in being both an unwilling talker and writer was perhaps because in a hundred years the Englishman's manner has changed. The hero of three generations ago was emotional in speech and could unashamedly allow the manly tears to flow; but the modern product of the public schools is given to a sedate understatement which is most pronounced in recalling moments of peril. This Wavell must have had many such moments which he did not trouble to record in speech or writing.

With the Welch, and later with the 6th Mounted Infantry, Wavell's experiences in the war resembled those of any other regimental officer. After the war, however, he was sent to examine some of the then little-known areas of South Africa to provide the War Office with confidential reports on Swaziland, Tongaland, and North Zululand. A second expedition took him through areas to the north of Bechuanaland, when from the spring of 1904 for sixteen months he never saw a white man.

The results of his work were printed in two secret *Précis* of Information for the General Staff. The first, which had been begun by another officer, covered the physical features of the three districts, the vegetation and crops, the character of the rivers, the history of the country, the population, administration, and native politics. Wavell's observations were, of course, primarily of import to soldiers. Thus, he deals with the extent to which the natives were armed, their fighting tactics and war organization, the quality and supply of water in various areas at different seasons of the year, camping sites, points at these sites which should be picqueted, the best bases for operations, the nature of communications, the areas in which guides should be employed because of the network of kafir paths, the width of rivers and whether or not they are infested by crocodile—a matter of some interest to troops who might have to cross them.

The second *Précis*, for Bechuanaland, was entirely

Wavell's. It covered physical geography and topography, the political history and administration of the country, its industries, products, and resources, ethnography, and native history. Again he noted the character of the natives, their arms, the probable tactics of different tribes in the event of war, and matters of transport, communications, and bases. Wavell added a small glossary of words in Zulu, Sechuana, and Dutch, likely to be useful to an expedition, such as the terms for mountains, rivers, roads, forests, swamps, and native villages. Both *Précis* contained many detailed itineraries across the areas examined, and Wavell mapped various traverses, including one from Palapye station to the Zambesi. His reports, vivid, clear, and succinct, illuminate those territories for the reader. A schoolmaster reading them might well feel that were text-books written in this style the subject of geography would be a pariah in fewer schools.

Wavell's companions in Bechuanaland were natives, and there was real danger from some of the tribes. On one occasion he and his party were in immediate peril of death at the hands of a tribe, when Wavell ordered the Chief's son, who had evidently been troublesome, to be publicly punished. This order, given in circumstances when Wavell and his men could have been murdered out-of-hand, was a bold bluff, but the natives were sufficiently impressed by the white man's personality to carry out the order, and henceforth the Chief was polite and his followers helpful and anxious to please!

Wavell crossed the Kalahari Desert to the Victoria Falls. In the rapids of the Zambesi his canoe was overturned, but his maps and journals floated and were saved. They were highly valued at the War Office, but Wavell wrote nothing for normal publication about these expeditions. In conversation he would simply refer to the Bechuanaland journey as a "pleasant trip."

The crisp style, the sense of completeness which one

associates with treatises in the French language, and the sound military knowledge displayed in these reports are even more notable when one recalls that they were the work of a subaltern in his early twenties, one, moreover, who lacked training in the staff aspects of soldiering. Obviously he had learned much from his experience against the Boers, and he once said that, however scientific war might become, it could never be learned solely from books, any more than could violin-playing. He had, in addition, from a family of soldiers, a broad background of knowledge in the science of war. It is certain that had he remained in the profession and survived mischances he would have reached the highest employment. However, by the time his *Précis on Bechuana-land* was printed by the War Office in 1907 he had already resigned from the Army.

Going to the Boer War almost straight from Sandhurst, Wavell had not experienced peace-time soldiering, and finding that it held no attraction for him, he resigned his commission in 1906. After some time spent in big game-shooting in East Africa he settled down at Nyali, near Mombasa, to cultivate sisal. Like his father, who knew four European and three Oriental tongues, Wavell had a *flair* for languages, and spoke French, Italian, and Swahili fluently. Now he began to learn Arabic, and in a short time made such progress that when life in Africa became too uneventful he felt sufficiently competent to consider a visit to the Holy Cities of Arabia. By 1908 he had made his preparations. *

In the ordinary way at that time, when the Hejaz was part of the Turkish Empire, there was no unavoidable obstacle to a European's visiting Mecca. He would have to profess Mohammedanism before a Kadi, impress Moslems who knew him that his conversion was genuine, and apply to the Foreign Office for a passport. There would follow an almost endless correspondence with the Porte, and, after using every trick of delaying action, the Turks would grant

a passport. During his stay in the Holy Cities the pilgrims would then be provided by the Turks with an escort. Wavell knew all this, and such a conducted tour did not appeal to him. He decided to go without official permission, and in disguise.

His slight, slim build and dark complexion were advantages, for he could pass as an Easterner more easily than many Turks, Syrians, Persians, and Kurds, some of whom were fair-haired and blue-eyed. He spoke Arabic as fluently as many Eastern people, few of whom could, for instance, pronounce Arabic consonants in the Bedouin style. Wavell decided to call himself "Ali bin Mohammed," a Zanzibari.

Travelling from London, he met at Marseilles the two men he had chosen to travel with—men he could fully trust. Abdul Wahhid was an Aleppo Arab living in Berlin, a Sheie of a well-known family, a man with, in Wavell's words, "a long tongue, a talent for introducing himself and for making friends with all and sundry, and . . . a most fluent liar." His other companion, Masaudi, was a negro, a Mombasa Swahili. Later they engaged two Persians as servants, Ibrahim and Jaffa.

From Marseilles the party went to Genoa and thence sailed to Alexandria. Up to this point Wavell wore European clothes, except for a fez, but behaved like an Oriental in gestures and deportment, arguing and chaffing with the porters who handled his luggage. He practised speaking the Arabic of Egypt, and for the journey from Alexandria to Beyrout changed into Arab dress. They took a deck passage, and from Beyrout went on to Damascus, where Wavell passed several weeks, including the period of Ramadan, to accustom himself to his part before proceeding to the Hejaz.

The section of the Hejaz line from Damascus to Medina had just been completed. On the train their travelling companions were Turkish officers, Syrian pilgrims and dirty Moroccans. When Wavell went down with malaria during

the rail journey his fellow-passengers treated him with the greatest kindness, crowding themselves still more to give him room to lie down. When he had recovered he noted with interest the barren country through which Doughty has passed, and saw the rock-dwellings at Medain Selih. Nearing Medina all the stations on the line were fortified with barbed wire and trenches, reminding Wavell of the South African War. As they approached the city they heard the sound of rifle fire, for Medina was in fact at war.

Before the Hejaz Railway was built the Turks had paid the Bedouin for safe-conduct for the pilgrim caravans. These payments had now ceased, and the Bedouin resented it. But they dared not make the railway a *casus belli*, as it was popular with the Arab world. Therefore, the Beni Ali and other Bedouin picked a quarrel with the Turks and were besieging Medina. Wavell averred with truth that he was "never averse to being where anything interesting was taking place," and at Medina he saw the fighting at close quarters. From the city walls he witnessed much sniping, and saw the Turks get the worst of a rather pointless sortie which cost them two hundred lives.

This period at Medina was probably the most dangerous of the journey. An Eastern appearance and a good knowledge of colloquial Arabic were not enough. The gestures, habits, phrases, and etiquette of the East had to be mechanical, a part of the actor. As Burton wrote, everyday things, such as the sitting posture or the way of drinking a glass of water, had to be mastered. If after taking a bath, Wavell wrote later, some one said to him "Naiman," and he did not know the answer, he would betray himself as clearly as if he were wearing "a sun helmet and a spine pad." He always understated the perils which he had encountered, but wrote that in the Holy Cities "a bad mistake when praying, visiting a tomb, or even in the responses during a service, might easily prove fatal."

From this time onward, for most of his stay in the Haramain, Wavell wore clothes made in Medina, the kind of dress commonly worn, so as to excite no interest. They consisted of wide cotton trousers, a shirt reaching to the ankles, a coloured gown, a sash which could hold a dagger and a pistol, and over these a *jubba*, a long, loose-fitting garment, with wide sleeves.

Apart from Arab bullets, or carelessness in matters of etiquette, Wavell ran a further danger at Medina and henceforward: he might be recognized by East Africans who knew him. Indeed, he expected to meet men who had told him they intended to make the pilgrimage. On one occasion at Medina the negro Masaudi met Mombasans who knew Wavell. They spoke to him, but he managed to evade them by a trick and warned Wavell. For the remainder of the pilgrimage Wavell had to be constantly watchful, and later, at Mecca, he was within a few feet of these men, who were staring towards him, but the sun was in their faces and they did not see him.

Official guides were appointed to the various nationalities who made the pilgrimage. No people in the Holy Cities were more observant and astute, so Wavell avoided all of them, and particularly those allotted to East Africans who would have perceived very quickly that he was no Zanzibari. This lurking danger must have caused him considerable nervous strain. He knew that if his identity was discovered quietly by officials they would do their best to get him unobtrusively out of the country, especially as he was an Englishman, and at that time there was great affection and respect for Britain in the East. Yet he also knew that if he were discovered by fanatics the best he could hope for in the way of deaths would be a speedy one, and that he would be unlikely to get it!

Most of the travellers in Arabia have written their stories in memorable language, but Wavell was not a Burton,

Palgrave, Doughty, or Lawrence. His style was simple, straightforward, soldierly, with occasional humour and graphic phrases. In Medina, in a careless moment, Wavell once became involved in a quarrel with some guides. "Weapons were drawn on both sides," he wrote. "At the sight of my automatic Colt the bystanders hurriedly took cover, being aware, possibly by experience, of the somewhat comprehensive effects of that weapon . . . We drew off, snarling at each other."

Because it is simple and straightforward, Wavell's story, which appeared in 1913, might be read as an introduction to the books written by the more renowned travellers in Arabia. It includes a short but comprehensive outline of Arabian history, a description of the Holy Cities, and a simple account of the ceremonies and festivals there. At Medina he visited the Tomb of the Prophet, performed the due ceremonies, noted points of military interest, such as the size of the garrison, the types of weapon in service and the character of the fighting, and described the great variety of nationalities among the pilgrims—the Indians, Chinese, Javanese, Anatolians, European Turks, Arabs from the West, Bedouins, Persians, Malays, Afghans, Japanese, and Egyptians. "Every Eastern race might be identified in the motley crowd and every variety of costume, till the whole resembled nothing so much as a fancy-dress ball."

An unbeliever discovered at Medina, Wavell considered, would probably be in more danger than in Mecca, for whereas at Mecca the feeling among Moslems was one of awe and reverence, there was more fanatical interest aroused at Medina in the place where the Prophet prayed, at the sight of the pulpit he preached from, the pillar against which he leaned, and the garden planted by his daughter. These marvels, Wavell wrote, might be spurious in a sense, but this idea did not detract from the pilgrim's appreciation. Many pilgrims burst into tears and frantically kissed the

railings at the Tomb; Indians and Afghans might fall down apparently unconscious. Although Wavell does not stress the point, one feels that it was no place for an Infidel.

Wavell joined a party of the poorest pilgrims who were approaching Mecca by way of Yanbo and Jidda. The caravan travelled through the rugged highlands from Medina to Yanbo, with Wavell's party on camels. During a halt at night he noted the indifference of the Bedouin camel-men to cold. "Clad only in thin cotton clothes, they showed not the slightest desire to come to the fire, but sat among their camels, laughing and talking, apparently neither hungry nor thirsty, cold nor tired, though they had walked fourteen hours on end, the temperature was near freezing-point, and they had eaten nothing all day. No wonder they are good campaigners. No civilized soldiers could stand this sort of thing for long."

Many pilgrims had to make the journey on foot, and it might be thought that the Arabs would respect co-religionists so arduously performing a religious duty. The besiegers of Medina, in fact, did not interfere with the caravan, but stragglers were constantly attacked by robbers, pillaged of their few wretched possessions and killed without hesitation if they tried to resist.

When Wavell's camel-man, Saad, began to demand *bakshesh*, and threatened to take his camels and go, Wavell replied that he would shoot him. The camel-man offered to fight it out with swords. Pilgrims intervened and begged Wavell not to fight, as, if one of these Bedouin were killed, his tribe would demand blood-money, and would probably plunder the caravan. Quite suddenly, however, Saad became most courteous, paying Wavell all kinds of small attentions. The Persian servant, Ibrahim, had told him that Wavell was a nephew of the Governor of Yanbo! Many of the poor pilgrims, however, were badly bullied and squeezed

for money. Wavell and his companions several times saved weak and old people from plunder and ill-treatment.

Wavell was not impressed by the attitude to Mohammedanism of the true Arab of Arabia, and held that in fact he was only nominally Mohammedan. Certainly he was not fanatical. Much had been made, he wrote, of the fact that Doughty in his famous journey had not denied his Christianity. That, in Wavell's opinion, was the least remarkable thing about Doughty's adventures. Doughty had not tried to visit the forbidden cities, and though the fact of his being a Christian was a good pretext for knocking him on the head, the Bedouin could easily have found another excuse for murdering him, or would have killed him, if they so desired, without any excuse. There was far more fanaticism, in Wavell's opinion, and more danger on these grounds for the stranger and the Christian, in other parts of the Moslem East.

From Yanbo Wavell sailed in a crowded ship to Jidda. He experienced trouble with the Persians who were handling the cargo of pilgrims, until Ibrahim informed his compatriots that Wavell was a near relative of the Governor of Jidda—whereupon his party was given more than its fair share of space in the ship.

While at sea they changed into the Ihram, the garb which all must wear approaching Mecca. It consisted of two cloths, one worn round the waist and the other round the shoulders. Wavell's was made from two Turkish bath-towels, cut long for the purpose. The head was left bare, though some people carried umbrellas for protection against the sun. In this dress, Wavell wrote, "I was glad that I had not acquired what is vulgarly known as a 'corporation.'"

At Jidda he waited four days, hoping to meet a Mombasa sheikh who was expected on the pilgrimage. This man might, or might not betray him, and Wavell wanted to get the matter straight in Jidda rather than take the chance of

meeting him in Mecca with his attitude uncertain. But when the sheikh had not arrived after four days he decided to take the risk, and with his companions travelled to Mecca by camel.

On entering the outskirts of the city Wavell and his friends recited the appropriate prayer—"O Lord, who has brought me in safety to this place, do Thou bring me safely out again." To this sentiment, he remarked, "one person at any rate in that caravan said 'Amen' most fervently!"

He performed all the ceremonies at Mecca, Muna, and Arafat, and at length put off the Ihram, "a most draughty and uncomfortable costume, which in so far as it is intended as a penance abundantly serves its purpose. My back was raw from exposure to the sun, and even my head was somewhat blistered." Then, as was the custom, he bought a new suit, of white robes with black *jubba* and a gold sash which held a dagger. He describes the Kaaba, the well of Zemzem, the places of worship in the neighbourhood of Mecca, the shops, the slave-market, the house where Mohammed was born, and the people met in the city. He also saw a good deal of social life, for they had introductions from people in Damascus, Abdul Wahhid had friends in Mecca, and they made new acquaintances. They were 'invited out' and Wavell entertained, without exciting suspicion, and they even talked politics with Turks and Arabs. In the atmosphere of liberalism then current, at the time of the Young Turk movement, Turks and Arabs were so enamoured of British institutions that after some of these talks they regarded Wavell as an old-fashioned reactionary.

Throughout these contacts Wavell felt that only once had he aroused definite suspicion, and that was with an Indian who had been a British Consul in the Persian Gulf. It was only a casual meeting, but perhaps to a man who had worked for the British there was something of the *sahib* about Wavell which stirred recollection. His Persian servants, Wavell

believed, sometimes had doubts about him, but they were not definite enough to lead to blackmail, or to tempt them to try to win credit by denouncing an Unbeliever.

Arriving back at Jidda, the three companions separated, Abdul Wahhid to Persia, Masaudi to Mombasa, and Wavell to Egypt. He concluded his account of the Haramain with some advice to those who would go there in disguise. Because he considered Medina more dangerous than Mecca, he held that no traveller should venture there who was not thoroughly at home in his Eastern character, and believed that he had survived Medina more by a series of happy chances than by good management. As for Mecca, he wrote, "With due observance of . . . precautions, a passable knowledge of Arabic and of Moslem ceremonial, and proper vigilance, the pilgrimage to Mecca may be made in disguise without running any risk worth mentioning." Few if any of the great Arabian travellers would agree with him in that!

Wavell was a reluctant writer and published no account of his journey until five years later. But then he provided two books in one—for he added an account of his adventures in Yemen—under the title *A Modern Pilgrim in Mecca and a Siege at Sanaa*. Like Burton, Wavell had sought the status of *haji* as an asset of prestige on future journeys in Arabia. In 1910 he planned to visit southern Nejd, travelling by the Wadi Douasir to reach the town of Riyadh. Sanaa in Yemen he chose as his base, because from this point, if it proved impossible to go to Riyadh, there were in his view two alternative ventures; he might go to Marib and thence travel down the Wadi Hadhramaut through much unknown country, or he might accompany a *mahmal* which had been going each year from Sanaa to Mecca, and thus see unexplored parts of the northern Yemen and Asir.

Wavell took with him a few scientific instruments, for he hoped to do some mapping, but all his kit was comfortably stowed in one handy tin box. He used his Arabic name and

his title of *haji*, but this time did not hide the fact that he was an Englishman by birth. Abdul Wahhid agreed to accompany him, though he said that Wavell had already turned his hair prematurely grey in the Hejaz. In October 1910 they sailed from Suez and in eight days reached Hodeida, the port for Sanaa, a group of whitewashed houses and rickety minarets on a desolate shore.

Now, Wavell, like his great contemporary in south-eastern Arabia, Wyman Bury, knew the Turks and their methods thoroughly well, and this second part of Wavell's book contains an assessment of their national character which was to be endorsed without reservation a few years later by many British officers in Turkish hands. One common failing which he noted among officials was mistrust of each other and of foreigners, and at Hodeida Wavell at once met their passive resistance. Abdul Wahhid at length abandoned hope of being allowed to proceed to Sanaa and went on to Aden by Egyptian steamer. Wavell, however, tricked the officials and travelled inland without permission.

He was at Sanaa in January 1911 when the Imam of Yemen made war on the Turks. Although kept under the closest police supervision by the Turks, Wavell saw some of the fighting in the neighbourhood of the town and observed a good deal—such as the numbers of guns and troops employed and the general military policy of the Turks. He noted the merits and defects of the Turkish Army, and appreciated the high quality of the soldiers despite their poor equipment. Not greatly impressed by the German-trained officers, he wrote that if he had to choose officers from among the Turks he would make his selection from “the rough-bearded, unkempt-looking ruffians, with dirty uniforms, down-at-heel slippers, and heavy, curved swords of a pattern long obsolete, who may be seen in any garrison town, sitting in the dingy cafés, smoking water-pipes and playing backgammon.” He was probably in more danger

at Sanaa than in the Hejaz, but one cannot relate here his suspicions of poisoning, the plans to deport him, his escape, recapture and imprisonment, the humour with which he met all situations, and his indignation at what he considered British 'appeasement' of Turkey, at that period. Eventually he had to leave Yemen, and was in East Africa when the Great War began.

When war came he wanted to return to England, but the authorities at Mombasa seized upon all the trained soldiers available. Wavell raised a force of local Arabs known at first as "Wavell's Arabs" and later officially described as the Arab Rifles. Welding this material into a useful force was hard work, and arms were scarce. "Some of their ancient rifles," he once said, "went off more or less regularly, and comparatively few actually burst." But he got many good laughs out of his improvisations: it was a completely 'one-man show,' depending on Wavell's personality and his prestige with the Arabs.

His humour, tact, and command of Arabic all helped to get the best from these men. Moreover they could admire the powers of endurance that enabled him on one occasion to march sixty miles in twenty-eight hours through rough East African country. At first he had only one hundred men, but they were of decisive service in the early days of the war.

When the Germans began their advance along the road to Mombasa, which is on an island, Wavell crossed to the mainland with his Arabs, a few native police, and some European volunteers, and in September 1914 advanced to meet the enemy at Marjorini. The Germans were superior in numbers and arms, but his men fought strongly in the defence of a block-house, using their rifles and two old, small guns which fired scrap-iron.

Wavell was wounded in the shoulder, and the bone of the upper arm was badly broken. His wounds were dressed, and while he watched the action in progress the way in

which the old guns were handled made him laugh so much that the bleeding nearly started again. After this engagement the Germans retired, and Mombasa was saved.

Although his wounds were not healed, and with one arm quite useless, he was back with the Arabs two months later, and was sent, with the rank of major, to command at Mwele, a post covering a section of the Uganda railway, against which the German *askari* were constantly making small raids. In January 1916 Wavell went out with eighty men to make contact with an enemy party in his vicinity. His force had come under heavy fire from the thick bush, when a shot exploded a box of bombs and Wavell was wounded in the leg. He was soon in action again, firing a light rifle with his one serviceable arm, when he was shot in the chest and killed. His men were driven back, and the Germans buried him, placing a cross over his grave. He was thirty-four years old.

So, in this forgotten skirmish of a great war, died a fascinating personality. Had he survived until a few months later the name of Wavell might well have been linked, in other theatres of war, with that of Lawrence.

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CHAPTER IV

SUBALTERN

Winchester Scholar—A letter from the Headmaster—The Army Class—"Voluntary enlistment"—A field day—Winchester's product—Contemporaries—Holidays—Sandhurst—The column war—India—Fighting the Zakka Khel—Staff College—In Russia
—Under arrest

THE fourth son of Arthur Goodall Wavell was born in 1843. Archibald Graham Wavell, of Little Somborne, near Ringwood, in Hampshire, served with the Norfolk Regiment and the Black Watch, saw active service in African campaigns, and after a short period at the War Office went out to the South African War as a Major-General, to command the 15th Brigade in the Seventh Division. He had three children, and before his death at the age of ninety-one saw his one son attain General Officer's rank.

This son, Archibald Percival, now Field-Marshal Viscount Wavell, was born on May 5, 1883, in Essex, where his father was in garrison. As a small boy he saw something of the British Isles and the wider world, in travelling with his father. One of his oldest friends, K. G. Buchanan, now Major-General, describes him in these earliest years :

My old home was in Lanarkshire, and one afternoon Colonel Wavell, commanding the Black Watch, rode over from Maryhill Barracks with his son Archie to repay a call my father had made on the Regiment. Although many years ago, the incident has always remained in my memory. Firstly the contrast between the Colonel's shining black mare and Archie's very diminutive ragged pony; and secondly, my first impression of Archie as a very small boy in 1889. He was shorter than myself, but stocky and probably half a stone heavier. My description of him afterwards, after our guests had departed,

was "a funny, quiet sort of chap!" The visit disclosed that Archie was going to Summerfields, where I was myself destined in the coming September. He was always well ahead at school, since at no school did he ever start at the bottom rung. As a small boy he was physically stronger than most of his fellows, but quiet and not aggressive. He did not shine particularly at games but used to go very straight for his man at football. Lessons appeared to come easy to him, in fact he seemed to do less work than the average. He made no particular friends and was inclined to be shy and uncommunicative. He was rather untidy in appearance, yet meticulously tidy in his work.

At Summerfields Wavell was not considered an outstanding candidate for a Winchester Scholarship, and so received no special coaching. Nevertheless in 1896 he won the 7th Scholarship. The knack of doing well in examinations cannot be taught. Stephen Gwynn gets close to defining the type of mind required when he says that "anybody who spells right instinctively will always be able to pass examinations." Throughout his early career Wavell was fortunate in possessing this valuable dexterity in satisfying examiners, and was often held up as an example to his cousins. The Winchester Scholarship, however, demanded something more than examinational facility; it called for a standard of merit as high as exists in English schools.

The College was founded in the fourteenth century by William of Wykeham, to help in the revival of education, especially with a view to providing priests after the ravages of the Black Death. Wykeham was one of the four leading men of his age—the others were the Black Prince, John of Gaunt, and Chaucer—and as Bishop of Winchester and Chancellor of England, which in those days corresponded to Prime Minister, though with more power than any Minister to-day, he was able to collect rich endowments and give

great prestige to his foundation. In 1378 Pope Urban VI allotted other endowments when he issued the Bull empowering Wykeham to found a college for seventy poor, talented scholars who should live in common. By 1393 the buildings of "Seinte Marie College of Wynchestre" were ready. The Scholars, who probably comprised the whole original school, for it is doubtful if even the local knights or barons could gain admission for their sons, were intended to supply students for Wykeham's other foundation, "Seinte Marie College of Wynchestre in Oxenford," or New College. To-day the seventy Scholars are about one-seventh of the number of pupils, and form a nucleus of great ability, keeping the intellectual standard of Winchester at a level worthy of its origins. Wavells have been Scholars at Winchester in every century (save the present century and possibly the sixteenth) since its foundation.

Wavell joined the Army Class, despite a letter of protest from the headmaster which reflects the contemporary practice of sending the duller sons into the Army. "I regret to see you are sending your son to the Army Class, and I hasten to assure you this desperate step is not necessary, as I believe your son has sufficient ability to make his way in other walks of life." Few of the brightest minds would be found in an Army Class, although there were some able boys in Wavell's. For a time Wavell had some extra tuition in mathematics, with Steele, the Army Class master, who soon wrote to Wavell's father that the son knew enough mathematics to enter Sandhurst, appeared to have no wish to learn more, and was therefore wasting his teacher's and his own time. Some boys joined the Class at Winchester simply to avoid Greek. This was not Wavell's object, but he was glad to abandon Greek, perhaps because his earlier teachers had laid more stress on grammar than on the excitements and drama in Greek authors. "The composition of a Greek task of prose or iambics," Wavell wrote years later, "was com-

plicated by the fact that I never began to understand the system of accenting Greek, and was reduced to a haphazard sprinkling, which one of the teachers called the 'pepper-box method.'" In this failing Wavell was at one with G. K. Chesterton, who was delighted by the discovery in later life that the Greeks themselves were equally ignorant, since the accents were invented by fifteenth-century scholars. The order, accuracy, and discipline of Latin appealed more to Wavell.

Those who remember him at Winchester describe him as quiet, reserved, hard-working, studious, and tenacious, as a fair footballer and moderate cricketer. Wavell himself tells of his induction to the military life. The first uniform he ever wore was that of the Hampshire Regiment in the School Corps, before the Officers Training Corps were introduced. "The Corps was really voluntary then," he says. "I know that because I remember well, in my first half at Winchester, how one of the prefects, discovering that I was the son of a soldier and destined for the Army, took me fairly kindly but quite firmly by the ear and led me, despite protests, to the Armoury, and enrolled me as a voluntary recruit."

In this way, as a small boy, he came to wear a red coat and carry a weighty old Martini on marches when, as he says, "every one else seemed always out of step." Skirmishing on Teg Down, he wondered if he was really going to like soldiering. Yet once there came a moment of sheer joy amid his sufferings. It was a big Public School Field Day, in which a battery of Regular artillery was taking part.

The School Corps [he recalls] had to retire hurriedly, so hurriedly that I and a few others of the smaller and lazier ones were left behind and lay down to rest in a sheltering ditch. Presently the battery rode up and unlimbered majestically alongside us to shell our retreating comrades. After a moment's hurried consultation we decided it was too good a chance to miss, and poured our blank into the battery at a few yards'

distance. To our joy an umpire appeared and ordered the battery out of action and we even earned a paragraph in the next day's paper to the effect that our reverses in South Africa were hardly surprising when a handful of Winchester School-boys could put a Regular battery out of action.

It has been charged against Winchester that in its long history it has produced no one to whom history allows supreme ability and achievement. Among statesmen it has Addington and Grey of Falloden; among novelists, Trollope; among soldiers (until recently) it has been said that Winchester's most notable officer was one who performed a smart tactical manœuvre at Waterloo. Most men of common sense would rate Arnold of Rugby, a Wykehamist, among the great schoolmasters; but there are those who would reply that his achievement, the saving of the English public school, would have been better left undone. It is not necessary to labour the point that the criterion of a school's work should not be the public fame won by its pupils. A school is best judged by the outlook and the way of life of its average product. This way of life is the meaning of "manners" in Winchester's motto, and Wykehamists have been loyal to the best in contemporary ideals at some difficult times.

At the Reformation, for instance, when the College was still mainly what it was intended to be, a place for poor students, the Scholars resisted the Elizabethan Church settlement. Troops were brought in to terrorize them. Twelve of the Scholars left the College, relinquishing their chances of education and advancement; the others, as far as is known, had to submit. In the early years of Elizabeth most of the books—and by far the best—on the Catholic side of the controversy were written by Wykehamists. There is a list of some eighty Scholars who entered the College between 1488 and 1492, an incomplete list, but one that reveals a great constancy to the Winchester teachings of that age. More

than half of these men were deposed from their positions in Church or State for refusing to conform to the new Church system; thirteen were imprisoned; five died in the Tower or other prisons; nine became Jesuits and one a Jesuit lay brother; five were executed; others resigned their positions and left England, and most of the Fellows of New College refused to conform and were removed. Exiled Wykehamists helped to found the college at Douai which trained priests for the English mission, the shortest and most certain path to martyrdom in the sixteenth century. Whether these men were right or wrong, their record was proud. Nor has modern Winchester forgotten its dedication, for the Wavells who attended the College in later generations still saw the statue of Our Lady on the renewed Outer Gate, and were reminded of origins when they doffed their hats to the group of "Seinte Marie," the Angel and the Founder at the Inner Gate.

Now, these Wykehamists served a cause and expressed a faith, as did More and Fisher, and many of them were men of high ability; but even the ablest and noblest of them, unlike More and Fisher, are known only to specialists in history. This is characteristic of Winchester. It has produced men who serve the State and English life, unknown to newspapers and history text-books, but often with honour in their own field of service, and always with usefulness. They are the civil servants in England and the Empire, the university dons, doctors, clerics, scientists, and regimental officers, and rarely the headlined politicians, financiers, and manufacturers. The great gifts of the Scholars, in particular, seem to have been applied to the unseen direction and control of State services, rather than to the acquirement of fame.

The Scholars of Wavell's time included Sir Maurice Hallett, who went from Summerfields with the 6th Scholarship in Wavell's year, and was Governor of the United Provinces when Wavell became Viceroy of India. Sir

Duncan Mackenzie became an Indian administrator, as did C. H. Malan and M. S. Leigh. Another contemporary, Vincent Stow, became Principal of Mayo College, while R. H. Moberley became Bishop of Stepney, and P. J. Verrall reached eminence as an orthopædist. India seems to have had a great attraction for Wykehamists of Wavell's time, though his contemporaries made careers in a wide variety of professions in many parts of the world. Lord Dowding, the British air commander in the Battle of Britain, was in the Army Class with Wavell. They had little contact at Winchester, and little afterwards, but Dowding always felt a tie of sympathy with Wavell. In later years, he says, he always regarded Wavell as one who had successfully resisted the tendency of a military career to blunt his natural sensitivity, conscientiousness, and flexibility of mind.

The Second Master in Wavell's last year, Mr Montague Rendall, possesses at the age of more than eighty a memory which rivals that of the famous Mr Chips. He recalls clearly all the Scholars of Wavell's time, and though of Wavell he claims to remember little, his picture is not without character. "He was only sixteen and the seniors were eighteen. I can recall him as a sturdy, independent figure, moving with complete composure among all and sundry." Wavell did not follow the normal school course, for the Army Class considered itself a privileged community and was in fact a first-rate 'cramming-shop.' In addition, as a Scholar he led a more independent life than a boy in a House, and for the most part was among boys older than himself. Leaving Winchester early, after four years instead of six, he did not become Prefect of Hall, as he would have done in the ordinary course. Two years later the Prefect—that is, the Captain of the School—was a boy who had been junior to him. At seventeen and three months, in January 1900, Wavell passed fourth on the list into Sandhurst.

During his years at Winchester and Sandhurst he spent

many holidays in Scotland, as his father had a command at Perth. Sometimes in the summer, with his sisters, he visited a place near Mallow, in Southern Ireland, where an uncle and aunt had a son and daughter of the same age as the Wavells. On these holidays his chief amusement was shooting, but he was then, as always, a great reader and read a vast amount of poetry. Kipling and Browning were his favourites, and perhaps because he read them in youth these poems remained longest of all in a retentive memory. "Morning Lines" at Winchester, where attention was given to verse for forty-five minutes from seven in the morning, gave Wavell practice in memorizing, and the beginning of a store of poetry. Much of the poetry which Wavell has read throughout his life remained with him by heart. Even earlier than Winchester, as a very small boy, he learned "Horatius," by heart, would recite it to his aunts for threepence, or refrain from doing so for sixpence from an uncle!

Passing out from Sandhurst in January 1901, he was appointed to the Black Watch on May 8, three days after his eighteenth birthday. In the following October he joined the Second Battalion in South Africa. There were now three Wavells on active service in the veld—father, son, and a cousin, A. J. B. Wavell.

II

It was, as Wavell describes it, the "column" period of the war, fought in a wide arena, where towns, roads, and railways were scarce, in a vast expanse of veld and bush. The British had isolated the civil population, burned the farms, driven off the stock, and divided the country into areas bordered by block-houses. This action had been regretted by the British Command, but to be effective in denying the enemy supplies and civilian help it had to be

done thoroughly. The columns, consisting usually of two regiments of cavalry, a few hundred infantry, and some guns, 'drove' the country in order to corner the Boer commandos, capture them or force them to fight without the choice of ground. This warfare called for hard 'foot-slogging' or long days in the saddle. It was a good tactical school, insistently demanding hardihood, cunning, and initiative, for only the *élite* of the Boers remained in the field—an experienced, skilful, and courageous enemy.

Most of the time [Wavell relates] the Battalion was with Rimington's column in the Orange Free State or the Transvaal. There was a great deal of trekking after the very mobile Boer columns, but the infantry seldom got much of a chance at the enemy, who were far too fast for anything but mounted men. We took part in the big drives in which a large number of columns were employed towards the end of the war, and these were hard work and sometimes exciting.

These columns captured Boers, took small convoys, had some brisk fighting, and generally wore down the Boer guerrilla resistance. For the most part, however, it was a matter of marching, and the men sang:

Oh, why did I leave my little back room
In Blooms-bur-ee,
Where I could live for a pound a week
In lux-ur-ee!

The plaintive chorus drove Wavell's commanding officer into fury, and at length he forbade it. "As a very young officer," Wavell wrote forty-two years later, "I thought he was wrong; as a Commander-in-Chief I am sure he was."

Wavell remained with the Black Watch until the end of the war. Then, playing in a football match to celebrate peace, he took a fall which caused a very complicated break of the left shoulder-blade, left collar-bone, and the top of another bone. After three months in hospital in South

Africa he was invalided home. Since that time he has never been able to put his left arm straight above his head.

In 1903 he rejoined his regiment in India. An officer's work in those days provided an easy existence, and this suited Wavell, who was more interested in sport than in military routine. His stations were all in Northern India, at Ambala, Sialkot, and Peshawar. Here he enjoyed many forms of sport—polo, regimental cricket, hockey (he was captain of the regimental team), football, in which he played in his company team, and hunting with the Peshawar Vale, with which he won several point-to-point races. But shooting was his favourite sport, and as leave was plentiful he was able to make three trips to Kashmir and shot ibex, deer, black bear, red bear, tahr, and other game. On one occasion north of Baltistan, on one of these shooting trips, he had to race a snowstorm in order to get off the Deosai Plateau before snow blocked the pass, and made a fast forced march of some thirty miles.

In 1906 he went to Chitral as Transport Officer to an Indian mountain battery. In those days there was a battalion at Chitral which was relieved every year, the relief force marching up from Nowshera and back. It was a five-week trip, which he found a pleasant change from parades and sport. At the end of the next year the Black Watch moved to Sialkot, the subalterns regretfully, for Peshawar seemed the ideal station. Wavell was soon back again, and by the exercise of presence of mind was enabled to gain a little more experience of active service.

Between British India and Afghanistan lies a belt of Tribal Territory inhabited by the Pathans, hardy and skilful warriors whose terrain is rocky and barren. Their whole life was a struggle for existence, a prolonged skirmish, for they fought among themselves, in feuds between villages and families, and against the British and Indian troops who guarded the wealthy, desirable regions beyond the Khyber

Pass. Expert guerrillas and stealthy assassins, in the course of history they must have killed very large numbers of India's frontier garrisons. Their territory has always been a training-ground for British troops.

Among these tribes, in the Afridi group, were the Zakka Khel, who inhabited a part of the territory so remote and unproductive that raiding and blackmailing their neighbours were almost the only means of sustaining existence. For several years the Zakkas had been troublesome to the British, and they showed no signs of altering their ways. Indeed, their activities increased to such an extent that in 1907 an Afridi *jirga* asked the British to occupy the Zakka's Bazar Valley. Then a Zakka *jirga* met and offered peace. But the price they demanded was too high, and the offer was obviously insincere: no one, in fact, and least of all their Pathan neighbours, trusted them. Outlaws in Afghanistan were urging them on to further disorders.

Early in 1908 some three or four score Zakkas, led by an outlaw named Multan, approached Peshawar. Although the Jamrud, Kohat Pass, and Bara roads were being closely watched, these superlative warriors slipped through. On January 28 they looted the Hindu quarter of the city, killed two of the police and about twenty other men, and with plunder estimated at £6500 escaped over the walls before police and troops could close with them. This episode gave Wavell a chance of further active service.

The British now rapidly and secretly assembled a force of three brigades of British and Indian infantry, four squadrons of cavalry, and some mountain guns under Major-General Sir James Willcocks. Most of the orders for rail, transport, supply, and medical arrangements were given verbally, and any telegrams concerning the Field Force were sent in cipher. Transport was kept to a minimum, no tents were issued, and officers' kit was cut down to bare essentials. Speed and a large measure of secrecy—more difficult to

attain in India—were thus achieved. The plan was to advance suddenly by a surprise move into the Bazar Valley, so that the Zakkas would be forestalled in positions they might choose to defend, and be shaken at the outset.

A fortnight after the Zakka raid on Peshawar the Chief Commissioner for the North-West Frontier, Colonel Deane, met Afridi *jirgas* and explained that the expedition was directed solely at the Zakkas, and that no annexations were intended. The Afridis received this well, and even agreed to hold the passes into Tirah, so that help for the Zakkas could come only from Afghanistan. On the same day the Field Force moved forward.

It happened that during this fortnight of preparation Wavell had been sent to Rawalpindi to do a month's attachment to the staff in order to qualify for the Staff College examination. One morning, while he was looking through some very dull administrative papers he had been given to study, an officer came in and 'borrowed' him to decipher some telegrams. He was shown how to use the cipher and was given a telegram which proved to deal with the force which was being secretly assembled for this frontier expedition, and requested the staff to detail an officer to command an ammunition column; the only qualifications were that he should have passed an examination in Hindustani, and have done a transport course. As Wavell was qualified in both respects the answer seemed to him to be obvious. He told the officer that the telegram was a very simple one which he could answer himself, and was told to carry on with it. Wavell then telegraphed that Lieutenant Wavell would command the ammunition column! There was some question later as to who had recommended him, but when it was discovered what had happened it was decided that he had shown some initiative, and he was allowed to go.

Of the components of an ammunition column Wavell

knew nothing, and on reaching Peshawar found that the staff shared his ignorance and had almost decided not to have one. Wavell was importunate and was finally told that he could go and form a column by himself. "A soldier," he says, "is never likely to forget his first independent command on active service." Wavell's consisted of Indian troops, for he obtained an escort of an Indian officer and thirty-two men, Sikhs, Dogras, Pathans, and Punjabi Mussulmans. His first command, he said when Viceroy of India, was an epitome of some of India's most famous fighting men. This escort he obtained from a battalion whose adjutant was a friend. From another friend, in the Transport, he acquired some camels, and persuaded another, in the Ordnance, to issue him with such ammunition as he thought the column would require. He then reported to the staff that his column was complete and in due course was allowed to proceed to the front.

On the day the Force advanced, a flying column under the Political Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Roos-Keppel, marched into the Bazar Valley by the Bazar Pass, after misleading the Zakkas as to its intended route, and got between the tribesmen and their lines to Afghanistan, at a village called China. Meanwhile two brigades entered the valley by another pass. Wavell was with this main body. One brigade was held in reserve at Nowshera.

The Zakkas had been well aware that the British would hit back, and had sent their families and herds into Ningrahar. Now they were probably expecting a slow opening of hostilities followed by a long, casual, irregular campaign. The first swift moves discouraged them, but their tactics followed the usual plan. As the columns advanced the Zakkas harassed them with rifle-fire. The troops dug pits and made sangars in which they sheltered at night. In the darkness the Zakkas crept towards these shelters, firing and throwing rocks, but they could not rush them as was their

practice, for the British surrounded their posts with barbed wire.

During the day the troops destroyed Zakka forts and carried away timber, forage, and stores. Resistance was sporadic, and though the Zakkas sometimes got in as close as revolver range among the boulders and *nullahs*, they were usually kept at a distance and on the move by shrapnel from the mountain-guns. Their most aggressive period was towards nightfall, when the troops were falling back to their shelters. Then the tribesmen would try to close in, for a little practice with knife and sword, and would concentrate on some special object of dislike, such as the guns or the Seaforth Highlanders.

The main enemy concentration was at Helwai, where the Zakkas had been reinforced by Sangu Khels and other Shinwaris from Afghanistan. After some skirmishing the towers and stores at this place were destroyed. By February 23 the tribesmen showed a desire for peace, and four days later terms were reached with a representative *jirga*. The Afridis promised to keep the Zakkas in order for the future, to punish the raiders, and try to recover the plunder. Then the Field Force withdrew as rapidly as it had arrived—perhaps to avoid any further ‘incidents’!

“The campaign,” says Wavell, “was a short one and nothing exciting happened, but my column issued a considerable amount of ammunition and proved useful.” For him, however, the affair was not ended, for he spent many months trying to explain to Ordnance why he had not filled in all the various forms that he should have done. “There is, I believe,” he wrote thirty-six years later, “a matter of ten rounds of small-arm ammunition still outstanding between myself and the Indian Ordnance.”

It was a small affair, but it helped to build up experience. While on leave in England later in 1908 he passed into the Staff College, first on the list in a competitive examination

of four hundred candidates. At twenty-five he was eight or nine years younger than most of the officers at Camberley, and afterwards he considered that he entered too young. Actually he had been hoping to spend a few years with the King's African Rifles in Somaliland, where there were prospects of shooting and active service. His father, however, had represented that he himself was getting old, that the son had been abroad a long time, and that the Staff College would give him two years at home. It was agreed that if he failed to gain entrance he should try for Somaliland.

His high place in the examination would not carry too much weight with the Staff College, for much depended on the opportunities a candidate had for study, and on the subjects, such as languages, that he had been able to take up. Nor would it much impress the students. Probably few of them knew who passed first—or they forgot it after the first few weeks of the course. The real criterion of ability, then as now, was the impression made by the officer during his training. Worth was assessed, not on marks, but on a careful comparison of the judgments of the instructional staff. Students were classed as A, B, C, or D, though not in a fixed and published order of merit, and this assessment has usually been justified by the officer's subsequent performance. Alexander, for instance, was graded A+, and Gott was an A. Many officers who were junior instructors at the Staff College have since become famous, among them Brooke, Paget, O'Connor, Pownall, and Montgomery—an indication that the judgment of these instructors is not merely academic.

At this time Wavell was introduced to the sport of ski-ing, long before it became commercialized, or, as he once said, "Tatlerized." Thereafter he took every opportunity of visiting Switzerland, and found his new pastime wholly enjoyable. More than twenty years later he used to recommend ski-ing as a sport for young officers.

Although he was naturally reserved, quiet, and not given to voicing opinions, the keener students noted Wavell very closely. "There was no question," says one of his contemporaries at Camberley, Colonel R. Wallace, "that if any of his class were going to the top Wavell would be one of them." Nor was he overlooked by the instructional staff, and emerged from his course in the 'A' grade. Sir William Robertson, then Commandant of the Staff College, said of him, when Wavell was a colonel and long before he was known beyond the Army, "Of all the officers who came under my notice, I should consider Wavell by far the ablest." It was doubtless this opinion which caused Robertson to send for Wavell and offer him a new opening. An officer who had just passed was wanted to go to Russia and learn the language. Always ready to see new countries, Wavell accepted.

Thus he came to spend almost the whole of 1911 with a Russian family in Moscow and on a small estate in the heart of the country, forty miles from a railway station; the lady who taught him was the widow of a Russian writer who had been a friend of Tolstoy's; and their friends were mostly professors at universities, writers, and artists. "I am no linguist," says Wavell, "and found learning the language really hard work." Nevertheless he made time to travel down the Volga to Tsaritsin, which is now Stalingrad, and visited the Crimea and the Caucasus. He also managed to get a fortnight on manœuvres with the Russian Grenadier Corps, and in general combined study with seeing a considerable section of Russia.

On his return to England he passed the interpretership examination and after a short period in the training branch of the War Office spent the next two years in the Russian Intelligence section. In 1912 and 1913 he revisited Russia for manœuvres. In the former year he was with a Caucasian Corps, in the country north of the Caucasus which was

the scene of so much fighting in the autumn of 1942. After attending the manoeuvres in 1913, in the country near Kiev, he was arrested at the frontier through a mistake of the Russian secret police, and was detained by them for thirty-six hours.

Such are the facts of Wavell's career up to 1914. He was far above the average Army officer in intelligence and became a staff officer much younger than was customary; but beyond that it was any subaltern's story. His African fighting was "sometimes exciting," and his experience with the Zakka Khel "nothing exciting." It would take some form of special machinery to extract much about personal dangers from Wavell. His Staff College contemporary, Colonel Wallace, remarked that there is a lack of material about the early Wavell. "A man who was quiet, silent, clever, and studious as Wavell was, and above all not pushing or self-advertising, is not particularly noticed until his opportunity comes."

One thing, however, Wavell had seen which did not come the way of most subalterns. In Russia he had studied the movements of a large army, at a time when manoeuvres by even a single division or corps were unusual in Britain. His flexible and retentive mind had already absorbed all that experience in the field and the higher training had put before him. But now ideas and theories were to be tested in the work of leading and surviving in a grimmer war than the world had then known.

CHAPTER V

YPRES AND RUSSIA

9th Infantry Brigade—First Ypres—A cancelled relief—Brigade Major—Liverpool Scottish—The B.E.F.—Wavell's Map—Holding the line—Action at Bellewaarde—Wounded—Russians in the Caucasus—An awkward moment—The Revolution

WHEN Great Britain went to war in August 1914 Wavell was at the War Office, and all his attempts to get away with the original Expeditionary Force were unsuccessful. Even when he managed to reach France in September he was kept for some weeks in Intelligence at G.H.Q. before being appointed Brigade Major to the 9th Infantry Brigade, with his fellow-pupil at Summerfields, Buchanan, as Staff Captain.

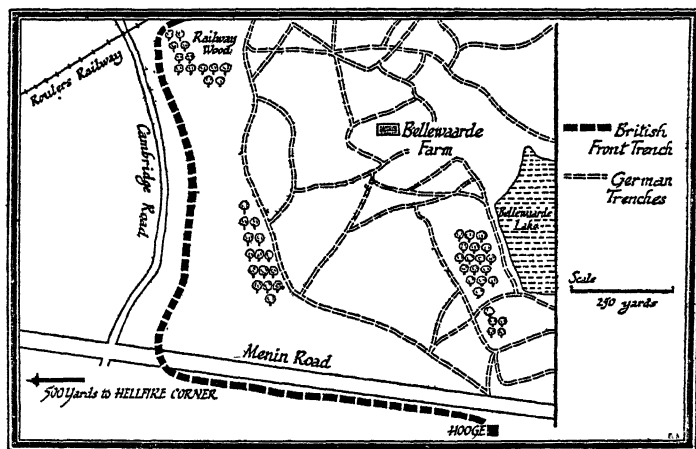
The Brigade consisted of the 1st Northumberland Fusiliers, the 4th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, 1st Lincolnshire Regiment, and 1st Royal Scots Fusiliers. At the Marne and the Aisne it had formed the advance-guard of the Third Division, and had proved a hard, sharp spearhead at the crossing of those rivers at Nanteuil and Vailly. Leaving this region of rolling hills, ridges, large rivers, and heavy green woods on the Aisne, it was moved to the north with the rest of the B.E.F. into a dank and misty autumnal landscape of flat fields, sluggish streams, and ditches marked by pollard willows, with a wet soil in which roads and tracks turned quickly to mud. Here on the La Bassée sector the brigade had held the Germans under heavy infantry attack, though supported only by a thin artillery. On one sector the Germans employed two hundred and fifty heavy and super-heavy guns against fifty British guns, mostly of obsolete pattern. Machine-guns were scarce in the B.E.F., and the

Germans were held mainly by rifle-fire, so rapid and concentrated that they believed the British were using machine-guns. Round Neuve Chapelle the brigade fought many bloody scuffles with bayonet and grenade, were shelled, sniped, and attacked by hordes of the enemy, and lived in conditions of rain, sleet, and liquid mud. By the end of October the Germans had made little ground, although they were employing every means of force and skill to break through the British and reach the Channel Ports.

Although the La Bassée sector was on the flank of the main German thrust, the fighting was as intense as at Ypres. The brigade was relieved at the end of October, but the two battalions still strong enough to fight were at once sent in at Ypres, in support of Allenby's hard-pressed cavalry. The 9th in these weeks had suffered very heavy casualties, but there were few reserves, and in a few days they were all engaged again in the line at Hooge by the Menin Road. Again they held the enemy, fighting in mud and rain, often among the boles of trees from shattered woods where it was difficult to dig cover. On November 11 the brigade helped to smash the attack of twelve and a half German Divisions, including the Prussian Guard, at Nonne Bosschen. This was the final German effort in this battle of Ypres, although for the 9th Brigade there was close fighting in trenches and ruined buildings for days afterwards, while snow and sleet swept over the battlefield. A shell landed in 9th Brigade Headquarters, knocking out the Brigadier, Staff Captain, and Signal Officer. The Brigade Major was out at the time, but was hit by a bullet the next day, so that a completely new Brigade Staff had to be assembled during a battle that might flare up again at any minute. Wavell and Buchanan arrived to find the brigade exhausted and, indeed, almost obliterated. It had its own four battalions and two battalions of the 15th Infantry Brigade, but the strongest of the six battalions numbered four officers and 284 other ranks, while

the weakest had only two officers and 168 other ranks. A spasmodic struggle was continuing all along the front by Hooze. The whole area was unhealthy, with German 5.9's deluging Hooze and the Menin Road.

It had been arranged that the French should relieve the brigade, but this had been cancelled just before Wavell and



BELLEWAARDE

Buchanan arrived, and the new brigadier, without a staff, was found thinking out a fresh plan. Both the new officers were employed at once, Buchanan to bring a reserve battalion into line, and Wavell to sort things out in the front positions. There was very little to stop the Germans, but they had taken heavy punishment, and the front was quietening down. It was arranged that on November 9 the French should take over the whole of the Salient round Ypres, and Wavell spent all the previous day going round the line with French officers. Everything was ready for relief on a night of brilliant moonlight and sharp frost, and the troops were standing to, looking forward to billets, and warmth, food,

and sleep. But the French did not arrive. The cancelled relief threw a great responsibility on the Brigade Major. He had to forget nothing and see that every one and everything remained in position. Such a situation is likely also to effect the morale of troops who had suffered as much as these. Wavell rose to the occasion, says Buchanan, with tremendous vigour and efficiency.

The brigade was eventually relieved and, after a week's rest, began holding various sectors of the Salient. Trenches were dug and breastworks erected in mud and rain, and the thin ranks were further lessened by the disease known as 'trench-foot.' The 9th knew the Saint-Eloi sector well, and experienced the shallow lines at Verbrandenmolen when the German snipers had the upper hand, smashing heads and periscopes on sight. The battalion histories record sudden bursts of shell-fire, and the *minenwerfer*-fire which was more shattering for infantry in weak cover, where the watery earth in sand-bagged defences turned to paste under a shower of rain.

One duty of a Brigade Major, the chief staff officer of a brigade, concerned with operations as distinct from administration, was to be in touch at all times with battalion commanders and to know exactly what was happening. It was not customary for staff officers to go into the front positions; Wavell was a 'front-line' man, not because he was fearless, for he had the normal dislike of being under fire or in danger, but because he always felt unable to deal with a situation effectively unless he had studied it at first hand. When the line was particularly lively he had two antidotes to meet fear. One was to repeat to himself verses from Francis Thompson's *The Hound of Heaven*; the other was the more commonplace remedy of having something so important to do as to take his attention from fear.

"They were critical days in November," says Buchanan. "We had many anxious incidents, but Wavell was always

calm and imperturbable; nothing would ever rattle him, and he inspired confidence. He was exceptionally tough and never spared himself. He set himself to know every part of his front and daily or nightly tramped many miles." As the Ypres battle died out, and the months of trench warfare ensued, critical moments were fewer, but they were months of constant warfare. Although few men ever saw a German at close quarters, casualties increased steadily from sickness, or by the efforts of distant gunners and almost as impersonal snipers. One battalion lost six hundred men, merely in the course of holding the line, and high percentages of loss were common.

The full strength of an infantry brigade in 1914 was nearly five thousand men. When Wavell's brigade was relieved at the end of November it numbered only six hundred. Wounded men returned, but the numbers could not be sustained, and the Regular Army was dying. Reservists were too few to complete the battalions, and as the Ypres battle ended Territorials were brought in to hold the line. The Liverpool Scottish joined the 9th Brigade at Westoutre, proud to join a brigade whose reputation was second to none in the B.E.F. It was with something of a shock, however, that they first saw Regulars on the march. Their historian, A. M. McGilchrist, wrote:

Many of the men had beards, their clothing was stained and muddy, and quite a number were wearing cap-comforters instead of the regulation flat cap. Anything more unlike the traditional smart Tommy it would be impossible to imagine. But there was one thing about them that did not attract the eye. Every man's rifle was absolutely spotless—not a bad illustration for civilian soldiers of the distinction between the superficial and the essential.

At a meeting of officers before the Territorial battalion went into the trenches at Kemmel, says the history, "the Brigade Major, Captain Wavell, explained the principles of

trench warfare as it was in those early days, and also issued instructions regarding the routine to be carried out in the line." This was Wavell's first experience of citizen soldiers.

A story of this period illustrates the comradeship that grew up between a good Territorial unit and a fine Regular battalion. On December 8 a company of the Lincolnshires, which had been two days in the line, made an attack from trenches so full of mud and water that the exhausted men could hardly drag themselves out. A few reached the German trench, but too few to hold it. The survivors were in such a pitiable condition that the Liverpool Scottish offered to finish their tour of duty—and these men, in kilts, shoes, and spats, spent the rest of the time up to the waists in running water. Then, as they marched out, they were met at the Laiterie, on the Kemmel-Vierstraat road, by the Lincolnshires, who had braziers burning for them, with dry socks, hot tea, and rum.

To understand Wavell one should see what kind of an army it was in which he was trained and met his experience. The division of which his brigade was part, twelve battalions of tired and decimated infantry with only a weak artillery support, had at one period of the Ypres fighting met thirty-nine German infantry battalions, four Jäger battalions, and twenty-eight regiments of cavalry, supported by a heavy artillery—and halted them. The Germans were men with an instinct for war inherited from generations of ancestors who had been soldiers of some sort, professional mercenaries hired by their rulers to foreign states, or plain conscripts. This instinct was developed in them from childhood, for they played war games more efficiently than English children play at football or cricket. Germans had no aversion to military service; to them it was natural, pleasant, and a joy to look back upon. At any period of history Germany could put into the field an immense fighting horde, even when the land consisted of many separate states. Unified, Germany

produced an army capable of fighting all Europe and America, with excellent prospects of success. Yet this formidable, enthusiastic army was held by a thin British line.

The B.E.F. was a small force of professionals, highly trained and experienced on the veld and the Indian frontier, unrivalled in the use of the rifle, and supported by a tiny but expert artillery. Such a force, for all its merits, could not be expected to stop the mighty German machine. The professional skill needed something else, and the British possessed it. The Germans were defeated by a spirit and tradition unique among the world's armies. The B.E.F. had a tone and morale peculiar to itself, based on a family spirit, an outlook, experience, and humour common to all; but its most characteristic feature was self-confidence. The old Regulars had a superb belief in their superiority in the use of arms, and never even considered the Germans as equals in professional skill or in any of the qualities of the soldier. Through all the ordeals of shelling and hand-to-hand fighting, as in the war of attrition and hardship in the trenches, this confidence never faltered. There was, in addition, a solid faith that British soldiers were never defeated through their own shortcomings, for English history had always blamed the generals or Britain's allies! Moreover, they had the further ingrained belief that doggedness and discipline were above all the marks of the British rank and file. Generals might be stupid, officers might be reckless, but the men were always tenacious.

This outlook was justified, for it was based on centuries of British conduct in war, and was supported by all manner of quaint and gallant regimental traditions. Thus, although they were beaten frequently in the minds of the German staffs, the British Regulars remained wholly ignorant of the fact. The Germans came to expect tactical crudeness in British operations, but they could never measure the British rank and file. They could not, for instance, reconcile the

professional skill and supreme self-confidence with the British soldier's dry, ironic, self-depreciatory speech. Their marching songs, as Wavell recalls, were unheroic:

Why did we join the Army, boys?
Why did we join the Army?
Why did we come to France to fight?
We must have been — well barmy !

"The old Army," Wavell wrote, "died grimly, confident in its war-craft, and giving harder punishment than it received." Wavell was trained and formed in that army. It was fortunate that he was not of higher rank in 1914, or that he did not remain at a desk in G.H.Q. As a general or staff officer, quartered in some remote château, the real nature of modern war might have remained unrevealed to him: as a front-line officer the lessons were driven home, in the harshest school.

Although they did not know it, the Regulars at Ypres performed a more enduring service than the saving of the Channel Ports, for they handed on the spirit of self-confidence and tenacity to the huge army of volunteers training in England. Even the Somme and Passchendaele could not entirely destroy the creed, accepted unquestioningly by all, that the British Army was inherently unbeatable; and the reluctant conscript, harried along by the German onslaughts of 1918, conscious of all his deficiencies as a soldier, never even considered that the Army might lose the last battle. This confidence, even without skill or experience, was worth something; and though they were given more cause than some of their allies, the British never knew demoralization.

In the winter and spring of 1914-15 Wavell experienced the trench war, wearing to the body and the spirit. On a short leave, in April, he was married in London to Eugénie Marie, daughter of the late Colonel Owen Quirk, C.B., D.S.O. (There were four children of the marriage, three daughters, and a son who followed his father's steps, to be

educated at Winchester and Sandhurst before joining the Black Watch.) On leaving the church after his marriage the first things Wavell saw were posters announcing the first German gas-attack at Ypres! He expected to be recalled, but as the 9th Brigade's front was not affected he was able to complete his leave.

Another gas-attack, on his return, had repercussions on the brigade's sector, when possible withdrawals had to be allowed for and reserve lines prepared. Wavell spent whole days in the line, alert and foreseeing in that snipers' paradise, reconnoitring and taking note of the enemy's activities and habits. There were many movements from one sector to another in and about the Salient in May to keep the Brigade Major busy, exploring new positions and siting defences. Wavell was an expert map-reader and map-maker, and as the early trench maps were often inaccurate he would spend days and nights checking up trenches on the ground for the whole brigade front. His own map was laid out on his table and was used by all to verify positions.

One morning [Buchanan recalls], our Divisional Commander at the time called in. There was much new work going on, especially in the digging of rear lines. He asked to see a map and was taken to Wavell's table. Having located himself on the map, the Divisional Commander picked up a red pencil, and grasping it as if it were a dagger, drew a thick red line across the map where he considered a reserve trench should be dug. Every one gasped with horror at this act of vandalism on this map which we were all so proud of. The line drawn had no relation to ground or to scale—I believe when we measured it up afterwards it was several miles long. Anyway Wavell, though his face expressed his feelings to us all, assured the general that he would inform the brigadier of his wishes, and the brigadier, he was sure, would examine the suitability of the area indicated.

In the evenings when Wavell was not up the line he

would put on the gloves and box with the Brigade Signalling Officer, a feather-weight of considerable skill. Wavell had the advantage in weight and strength, but had little knowledge of boxing, so that the bouts provided plenty of fun for the spectators.

In the closing weeks of the First Battle of Ypres and in the following months Wavell experienced the war of fixed, close-locked trenches and scuffles for mounds and ruins, and in this static, brutish type of warfare witnessed the gradual elimination of the best soldiers in Europe. Perhaps he was thinking of the stalemate of the trenches, and the possible remedies, on those occasions when he was silent in company. "He was never talkative in a crowd," says Buchanan, "and at times seemed detached. I always felt he was working out some problem on those occasions." Wavell had, in fact, the power of detaching his mind to work on an idea even in the noisiest company. As a junior officer he was both thinker and man of action, but to the men of his brigade competent action was more valuable than ideas in the slaughter-house of the Ypres Salient. A few surviving officers of the 9th Brigade still remember the lucidity of his orders and his complete efficiency.

Early in 1915 the city of Ypres was damaged, but alive. The war had struck with force at the Menin and Lille Gates, the Grande Place, the Cloth Hall, and the Cathedral, but the streets were still peopled with Flemish folk and British soldiers. Restaurants and *estaminets* were busy, shops sold tobacco and lace, and the barber and photographer found plenty of business. It was not until later in the spring, when the Germans brought 17-inch howitzers to bear on Ypres from Houthulst Forest, that the civilians were moved out. In the Salient to the east the devastation was increasing, and through the winter nights the city was illumined by the yellow lights that were to soar through the darkness for long years, when Ypres was rubble and desolation.

Ypres was held for prestige reasons, and on military principles the line should have run farther to the west. Everywhere in the Salient the Germans had observation, so that shells and bullets flew at the British from all angles. The routes to the line through and around Ypres were measured to the inch by the enemy's guns, and in the quietest times the casualties there were twice as heavy as elsewhere on the front. No part of this death-trap was unknown to the 9th Brigade. At the end of May some units of the brigade were in the line near Potije Château, when it was set alight by shells. Those who knew Potije Château's location in 1917 would not have recognized it at this time. The place was quiet, ruined farms had not disappeared, and abandoned live-stock could be acquired.

In the first days of June the brigade was in the line at Hooge. After a few days three companies were sent forward to capture Hooge Château—or, rather, its three remaining walls. They failed, but occupied the château's stables. It is difficult at this distance to discover the military import of the stables. Later in the war the infantry's comment would have been that they were needed for the time when the cavalry should break through. As a rule, these heaps of bricks meant something tactically in that close fighting, though there grew, in time, a suspicion that these small actions were suggested by distant staffs, who feared the infantry might grow soft through inaction. British commanders, it was thought in the line, could not support the thought of troops idling away their time in holes in the ground, and arranged for them to raid and act offensively. Territorials and conscripts who had no ingrained respect for rank came to view orders for aggression with considerable cynicism. It was noted that after some particularly deadly front-line affair medals and promotions followed in the rear. When aggressiveness had no obviously sound purpose and no effect 'save to cause heavy casualties enthusiasm was

damped. "The thrifty French," said Wavell, "held a trench line on the 'live-and-let-live' principle; the motto of the prodigal British was usually 'kill or be killed.'" It was a war in which commanders were generous with the lives of others. Early in the war Wavell observed all these things, and learned from the mistakes of his seniors.

Soon after the affair at Hooze Château the Salient flared up again in a murderous little action at Bellewaarde, where the German trenches formed a re-entrant at the tip of the Salient. Bellewaarde Ridge gave the Germans observation over the British positions, enabling their artillery to work with great accuracy and economy. The tactical objects of the British attack were to take the ridge and lessen the bulge in the line. Strategically the action was to be a diversion for another assault at Givenchy, which in turn was a diversion in support of the French offensive in Artois. With this last aim the British had already fought two expensive actions at Aubers Ridge and Festubert. Actually none of these lesser British efforts were successful as diversions, and the only sound reason for the Bellewaarde affair lay in its object of capturing locally important observation.

Allenby was the Corps Commander on the front concerned. Tactically the attack is of interest as a small-scale model of Western Front actions of future years. More 'refinements' were later introduced, for the staffs at this time were only learning the business of siege warfare, but Bellewaarde could stand as the prototype of many larger affairs up to the last months. Allenby, then as always, was thorough in preparation, and did his best to save casualties. At Bellewaarde telephone lines were laid in triplicate, by different routes, and alternative methods of visual signalling and carrier-pigeon were arranged. Wavell tells a story of Allenby's visiting the Third Division during the preparations. The artillery officer told him that ninety miles of cable would be required for triplicate lines, and a staff officer

with the Corps Commander remarked that the request was unreasonable and impracticable. Allenby replied to the artillery officer, "You shall have your ninety miles," and to his staff officer, in a tone that forbade argument, "You will see that it is supplied!" The cable duly arrived, and during the action the lines remained serviceable from battalions to brigade, and for most of the time to the front positions.

But the men killed in the attack did not, as Conan Doyle avers gratefully in his history of the campaigns in the West, "die happy" in the knowledge that at last the British had plenty of shells! Dying soldiers are usually not concerned with matters of supply; and, in fact, only a few weeks earlier there had been a first alarm among politicians over the shortage of shells. Improvement was not noticeable until later in 1915. A limited supply was allotted for this attack, and part of it fell among Conan Doyle's happy warriors.

A squadron of the Royal Flying Corps was detailed to work over the battle, and was successful in directing fire on enemy gun-positions; but when the close fighting began it could not distinguish between British and German on the ground. Several of the unfortunate things that happened in British attacks in later years occurred also in this action of June 1915.

The 9th Brigade was chosen to lead the assault on the half-mile of front where the trenches lay from fifty to two hundred yards apart. Lines of assembly trenches were dug, but as the Germans at once registered guns on them it was clear that any troops assembling there in daylight would be obliterated. So it was decided to bring the battalions forward at night and attack at dawn, which had not then become the customary hour for these affairs. The time chosen was, in fact, the only element of surprise, for though British and French corps on the flanks co-operated with rifle-fire and artillery they did not dig assembly trenches, so

that there was nothing to mislead the Germans as to the direction of the attack.

Through the short night of June 15 the 9th Brigade was brought up from the Poperinghe area and through Ypres. The front positions were taken over, with the 7th Brigade in support. The movement was not seen by the Germans, though they may have suspected something unusual, for from midnight they shelled Cambridge Road with 5.9- and 8-inch howitzers. At first light the Germans noticed some movement among the last troops arriving at the assembly trenches, and shelled them briskly for fifteen minutes.

The assault troops were formed into four lines. In the first were the Royal Fusiliers, the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and the Northumberlands, with the Wiltshires of a neighbouring brigade covering the right flank; in the second, the Lincolnshires and the Liverpool Scottish; in the third and fourth lines were units of the 7th Brigade, infantry of the Honourable Artillery Company, 3rd Worcestershires, 1/4 South Lancashires, and the 2nd Royal Irish Rifles—the Ulster Rifles of to-day. In addition to rifle, bayonet, and ammunition, each man carried two extra bandoliers of ammunition, gas-respirator, two empty sand-bags, a day's rations, and a ground-sheet. It was not a heavy load compared to those borne by infantry in some later battles. Each battalion had four hundred hand-grenades, mostly of the Mills type, and a hundred and fifty wire-cutters. Two platoons of each battalion had spades on their backs.

The first objective was the German front trench; the second, a line from Hooze to Bellewaarde Farm; the third, a trench by Bellewaarde Lake. The first wave was to take the first objective, the second was to pass through it to the second objective. The artillery was to move from the first to the second objective at a fixed time and keep on it until ordered to lift forward. Meanwhile the first wave was to reorganize, pass through the second captured line, and

advance to the final line, the artillery fitting its fire to these movements.

At 2.30 A.M. the British guns opened out, and at first the fire was so thin that the infantry, crouching in trenches only three and a half feet deep, began to feel uneasy about their prospects. But it gradually became stronger, and the men were mightily cheered when they heard the heavy crumps of shells from a howitzer known as "Mother" falling on Bellewaarde Farm. The bombardment continued, with three pauses. On the third pause, at 4.0 A.M., the Germans, judging the attack was coming, leaped to the parapets and opened rapid fire with rifles and machine-guns. At 4.10 the British guns caught them at this with a concentrated heavy fire. Five minutes later the troops rose and went forward.

The German front line was taken easily, with a hundred and sixty Wurttembergers, dazed with the gunfire, standing with their arms up among their dead and dying comrades. Barbed wire proved no obstacle, for though it was laid among the tree-stumps the artillery had cut it efficiently with shrapnel. In the German front trench the attackers were safe for a moment, as the German gunners did not realize it had fallen, and had begun firing on the assembly trenches. Perhaps it was this fire, as well as excitement, that now produced the disorganization that was to mark years of future British attacks. As soon as the second wave began to advance the Royal Irish Rifles, followed by the H.A.C., rushed forward to join in the fight. In an operation so accurately planned this was fatal.

The third wave became engulfed in the second, and the battalions went forward with such a rush that they were caught by their own artillery-fire. The reorganizing Fusilier battalions were thrown into disorder by this shouting, enthusiastic mass, and advanced before their due time. Trenches became jammed with men, and young, inexperienced officers could not control them.

Down came the streams of Germans' shells, from three sides, coldly and accurately observed. Sheer courage and dash carried the second objective, and some of the troops pushed on in a swelling torrent of shells to the final line. Smoke and dust hid them from their own gunners, and British shells fell among them.

The Brigade Staff had nothing to do with the planning of such an attack; they were executives, and henceforth a Brigade Major was fully occupied, for the situation became rapidly more tangled. Brigade H.Q. had taken position well forward, but was soon shelled out, and was then established in a splinter-proof shelter close behind the original British front line. Wavell doubtless fell back on *The Hound of Heaven* when pinned down by the shelling, but for the most part his antidote of action was well employed. Under terrible fire an attempt had to be made to regroup troops, correct British artillery fire, get to know where the units were, and prepare for enemy counter-attacks.

Hand-to-hand fighting now raged in the network of trenches, which were blown in, heaped with dead and wounded, and mostly too shallow to give much cover. At 7.30 A.M. the Germans sent in a regular counter-attack, which was held off by the British fire, as were two more that followed. Deadly affairs with bayonet and grenade were occurring everywhere; by 9.30 the forward groups had no more grenades and under the constant shelling had to fall back to the German front trench. But they were not easily driven off the ground. Until mid-afternoon a party of the South Lancashires held on in trenches near Bellewaarde Farm while Wiltshires bombed their way towards Hooge. Both parties were forced back about 3.0 P.M. towards the Menin Road, after suffering very heavy losses.

During the afternoon battalions of another brigade moving towards the fight were halted by German guns. 'As in all these trench assaults, the emphatic voice of the gun was

decisive. At 3.30 the Worcestershires and Royal Irish Rifles, now regrouped as two companies, attacked again. The Worcesters were dealt with at once by shells and machine-guns; the Irish went forward steadily until they were destroyed.

By six in the evening the fight was over. The British held half a mile of German trench, but the enemy still had the ridge and its observation. The Third Division's casualties numbered 140 officers and 3400 other ranks, and of this total the 9th Brigade lost 73 officers out of 96, and 2000 other ranks out of 3700. Wavell was among those listed as "dangerously wounded."

He was returning from the line in the early evening in what seemed to be a lull in the firing, and was making his way to Brigade H.Q., when the Germans opened a very heavy barrage of high explosive, shrapnel, and machine-guns. A 5.9 pitched near him, and either a splinter from this shell or a machine-gun bullet struck him in the left eye. In a short time he was practically blind. If he propped open his right eye with both hands he could just see, but this was painful. "The pain must have been intense," Buchanan recalls, "but Wavell made light of it." A field dressing was put over his wound, and as he was no more use in the fight, and was still able to walk, he set off for the nearest dressing-station, somewhere near the Menin Gate, guided by another wounded man. Enemy shell-fire was still heavy, and one large shell blew them both into a ditch without injuring them. When he reached the dressing-station an ambulance was just starting back through Ypres, so without waiting for further attention he got on the seat beside the driver and went back through the city, into which heavy shells were crashing. At a casualty-clearing station on the other side of Ypres he was bandaged up. Here another officer, a friend of his, who had been shot through the jaw, told him a good deal about his experiences in the action. It was not unusual

for a man wounded after a period of nervous strain to become voluble beyond his common habit, but Wavell could not imagine why his friend wanted to talk with a damaged jaw, especially as the injury had made his speech almost unintelligible. Wavell was in too much pain to pay attention. Eventually he was probably injected with morphia, for he had little recollection of how he arrived at the Base Hospital near Boulogne.

To one 9th Brigade officer Wavell had been no more than one of the shadowy figures that appeared in the night during the months of trench warfare. He was wounded and went back at the same time as Wavell, but he did not realize until they were in the same hospital at Wimereux that Wavell had been suffering appalling pain. "It was then," he says, "that I appreciated his great fortitude on that journey."

As Wavell went off down the Menin Road, Buchanan took over as Brigade Major, having, as he comments, "learned more from him than I can say, during our time together." Wavell lost an eye and remained in England until December 1915. On his return to France he served in G.H.Q. throughout the struggle on the Somme. This battle, covering the summer and autumn months of 1916, exemplified Wavell's description of the British method of fighting—"to take punishment grimly for round after round, and to wear down the opponent by heavy, if clumsy, body blows and tireless in-fighting." Although the British suffered bitter losses and could show the gain of little ground, this 1916 fighting helped in the end more than any other factor to break the German Army. As the battle was dying out in October, Wavell was sent to Russia.

II

This mission led him to the Caucasus. Headquarters on this front were at Tiflis, where the Grand Duke Nicholas

was in command, an officer, in Wavell's opinion, who was no great strategist, but a shrewd and energetic soldier, loyal to his allies. In this region of mountains and snow the Turk was the enemy. By attacking in the Caucasus in 1915 the Turks had hoped to draw troops from Russia's front against Germany and Austria, but they had been very roughly handled by the Russians. In 1916, before the Turks could be fully reinforced by the troops released after the British defeat at Gallipoli, the Grand Duke had attacked, defeated the Turks, and captured Erzerum and Erzincan. The front lay beyond these places when Wavell arrived. The British now hoped that the Caucasus armies might be of use to British operations in Mesopotamia and the Persian Gulf, despite the poor communications in the Caucasus and the Persian mountains. Maude was just beginning his advance on Bagdad.

Wavell visited the front, where there was little activity. That winter both sides were short of supplies, and the Russians had poor rations and suffered from typhus. Wavell has always had a high opinion of the Russian soldier. He says:

In 1914 the morale and spirit of the Russian Army was high. The Russian peasant had still at that time an almost religious devotion to the Tsar and confidence in his officers. By 1916-17 the spirit had changed; the Russian soldier was tired of being launched at strong positions with little artillery support and uncut barbed wire. He had lost confidence in his officers, partly because most of the old Regular officers had been killed, and the Army was officered largely by Reserve officers of the intelligentsia type without the same traditions.

In the early months of 1917 Wavell received a telegram from London to the effect that Maude's forces were advancing on Bagdad and were confidently expected to get through. It was suggested that he should try to induce the Russians

to advance on Mosul in conjunction with these operations. He therefore called on the Russian Chief of Staff, accompanied by the French attaché, gave his information from London, and asked if the Russians would co-operate towards Mosul.

A little to his surprise, the Chief of Staff agreed to the plan. His French colleague at once became excited, and said that if the Russians took Mosul the French flag must be hoisted there. (The French claimed Mosul, regarding it as part of Syria.) It was an awkward moment, as it was quite certain to Wavell that the Russians would not start an offensive towards Mosul merely for the joy of hoisting the French flag. Fortunately the French attaché did not speak Russian very well, and the Chief of Staff, who either did not understand him or pretended not to, asked Wavell what he was saying. Wavell replied that the French officer had said that it would be a proud day for the Allies when the Turkish flag was hauled down from Mosul! Then his French colleague asked him excitedly if he had explained about the French flag. Wavell replied that he had told the Russian all that was necessary about flags.

Wavell reported the conversation to London, mentioned the proposed Russian advance, but added that he was confident that they had no real intention of making such an offensive. His forecast proved correct. Weather conditions and poor supply lines, he explains in his writings on the Caucasus campaigns, delayed preparations, and the recall of the Grand Duke by Kerensky in March—"an incredible blunder"—removed the most likely source of action.

Sent to Russia as a relief for another officer who needed rest, Wavell's stay had been intended to last only three months. The officer did not return for six months, and by that time the Russian Revolution had begun. Wavell's wife had with great enterprise followed him out to Russia. Their

return journey was slow, for disorganization followed the Revolution; but they were fortunate in travelling from Tiflis to Moscow, and then to Leningrad, that their train was only three days late. They reached England through Finland, Sweden, and Norway.

CHAPTER VI

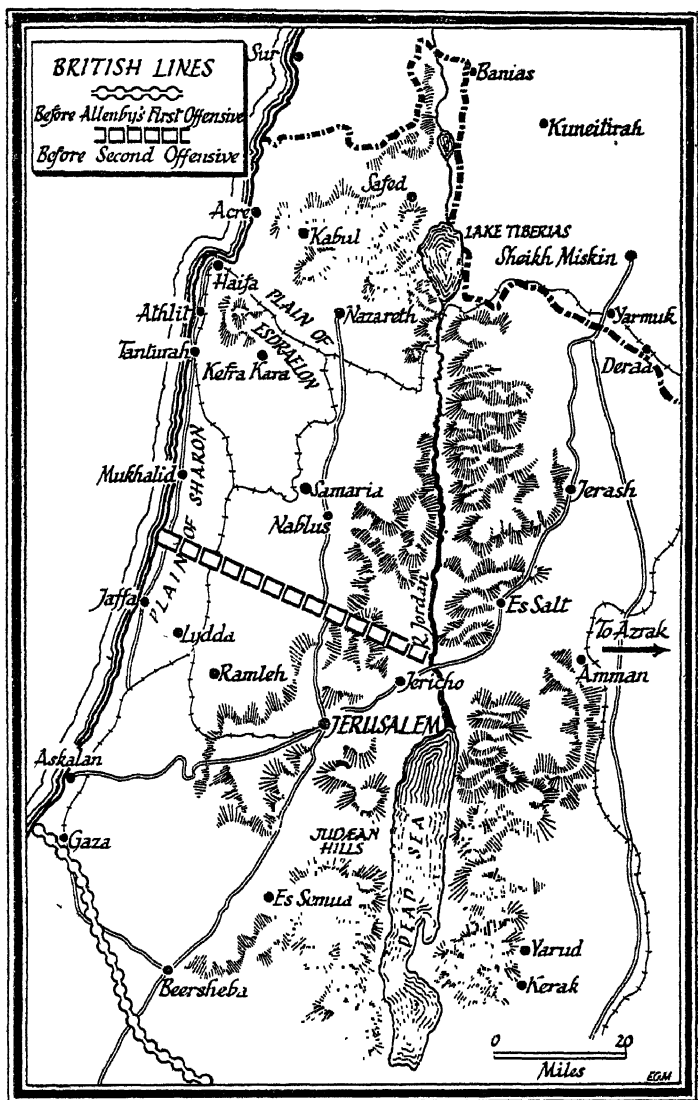
PALESTINE

Allenby's first offensive—Deception, surprise, pursuit—Capture of Jerusalem—At Versailles—B.G.G.S., XX Corps—Manœuvring and preparation—Misleading the Turks—Lawrence at Deraa—The great cavalry ride—Pursuit to Aleppo—Lessons for Wavell—Lawrence in Egypt

WAVELL expected to return to France, but was sent by Sir William Robertson, who was then Chief of the Imperial General Staff, to carry out liaison work between the War Office and Allenby, who had recently taken over the command on the Palestine front. It was the eve of Allenby's victorious offensives against the Turk. Witnessing and participating in these operations formed a large part of Wavell's education in generalship.

The Turkish line ran from Gaza inland for twenty-five miles to Beersheba. In the rear of their line lay the productive lands of Palestine, while behind the British to the south and east lay the desert. Allenby had to choose between attacking at Gaza, where he could be supported by the Navy and would have comparatively little trouble with water, which could be carried by the railway, ships, and a pipe-line, but where the Turkish positions were strongest; on the centre of the line, where the Turks were firmly established; or in the Beersheba area; there the Turkish defences were weaker, and there there was water—if the Turks did not destroy the wells.

Allenby decided to attack the Turkish left, and use the water supplies of Beersheba for subsequent operations, which envisaged a sweep from the east across the Turkish lines of communication. Wavell now watched a great soldier



PALESTINE

handle the three great problems of transport, supply, and deception. Allenby was dependent on horse-transport and camels, and it is an indication of the difficulties he had to meet that he had to use 30,000 camels, and that most of them had to be employed in carrying water. The transport and supply preparations are the least spectacular elements in war, yet they form the basis of success. Allenby prepared as thoroughly as ever, building up supplies, extending the line of railway across the desert, and training the troops for battle. He had to press on against time, for the Turks were moving reinforcements towards Palestine from the north, hoping to strike first and drive the British back into Egypt. While his preparations took shape he had also to convince the Turks that his main attack would be directed at Gaza, but he could not entirely conceal the gradual movement of troops to the Turkish left. Eventually a clever ruse implanted the idea of a Gaza assault in the minds of the Turks and their German commanders. A mounted staff officer, Colonel Meinertzhagen, allowed himself to be pursued by the Turks, pretended to be wounded, and while "reeling in his saddle" dropped a bloodstained haversack containing money, letters, and papers. Some genius had made these appear entirely convincing, and their import was that a feint was to be made at Beersheba while the real blow was falling on Gaza. In the minds of the enemy this appeared probable, because of the difficulty of the country on the approach to Beersheba. Allenby further persuaded them by keeping large numbers of troops in the coastal region till the last possible moment before moving them inland to the Turkish left. Moreover, a few days before the attack opened, Army and Navy began a bombardment of the Gaza defences. This probably finally convinced the Turks' German commanders, for up to this time it had always been the British way, on the Western Front, to knock loudly at the door for a long time, before opening it and walking into the waiting enemy's fire.

On the night of October 30-31 an army of forty thousand men, infantry and cavalry, made a long night march over featureless country, with such precision that by dawn they were in their exact position for attack. The infantry stormed defences near Beersheba, and before nightfall Australian cavalry rode over the Turks and captured the village—seizing the wells before the enemy could destroy them. Then Gaza was attacked strongly enough to draw Turkish reserves. It was hoped that the victors of Beersheba would be able to turn the Turkish lines, but even with the wells captured, the water supplies were inadequate. The Turkish armies farther west were therefore not cut off, but by November 6 the left of their line was finally broken, and they began to go back rapidly. On their right the British entered Gaza:

Successful or sustained pursuits, Wavell writes, are few in military history. The victorious general finds his opponent (if he is not overrun) stronger as he nears his bases, and has also to meet delaying actions and demolitions. But the main obstacles to successful pursuit, in Wavell's opinion, is psychological, a reaction in officers and men after victory. "Coolness in disaster is the supreme proof of a commander's courage; energy in pursuit is the surest test of his strength of will." Although the pursuit could not be pressed as relentlessly as Allenby willed it, largely because of the scarcity of water, it kept close behind the Turks in the plain and in the hills towards Jerusalem. At one time, while fighting in the rough country near Jerusalem, the British could not have held their ground but for the donkey transport which Allenby's foresight had prepared. Counter-attacks were beaten off, and the army surged forward. The Turkish commanders disliked these counter-attacks and would have fallen back clear of the pursuers to new strong positions; but fortunately the Germans insisted on them, and when they were repulsed the pursuit became more

effective. On December 9 Jerusalem was surrendered. Later in the month the Turks launched a strong counter-offensive, but it was held, and the British improved their position north of the city.

Wavell was one of the small party (it included T. E. Lawrence) which accompanied Allenby on December 11, when he entered Jerusalem on foot by the Jaffa Gate. A wave of joy and emotion swept over Christendom, and no doubt Wavell shared Lawrence's recognition of "the mastering spirit of the place."

When he returned to London, to give the C.I.G.S. an account of the campaign and of the general situation, Robertson ordered him to attend the Supreme War Council at Versailles, where much discussion was in progress regarding the future of Palestine. Wavell was disgusted at this order, but as Robertson wanted a representative at Versailles who was acquainted with all the details, Wavell could not avoid it. He was restive in these surroundings, wanted to get to an active theatre of war, and considered the existing staff at Versailles already too lavish. So as soon as the discussions were ended he escaped as quickly as possible. After these five or six weeks at Versailles he was allowed to return to Palestine.

Soon after his arrival Allenby appointed him Brigadier-General, General Staff (that is, Chief Staff Officer for Operations) in the XX Corps, commanded by Sir Philip Chetwode. His Corps Commander was a fine soldier, on whose written report Allenby had based his recent battle. Now lieutenant-colonel, Wavell was working under the greatest British general of the Great War, a Commander-in-Chief served by brilliant staffs. He was again concerned with Indian troops, not a handful of Sikhs and Dogras now, but an Indian army, for most of the European regiments had been moved to France, where the great German offensives of 1918 were in progress. Allenby retained the Australian Mounted Divi-

sion, but the remainder of his army for the final battles was mainly Indian.

The withdrawals of infantry, yeomanry, and heavy batteries for the Western Front delayed Allenby's plans for the final encounter. The Indians had to be brought from their own country and from Mesopotamia, and then needed reorganization and training to fight in large formations. While this was being completed, Allenby again prepared thoroughly, built up supplies, developed transport, and began cleverly misleading the enemy as to the direction of his next thrust. In the previous battle the British possessed superiority of numbers in both infantry and cavalry. In 1918 their great superiority was in cavalry, which greatly outnumbered the Turkish mounted forces. Allenby intended to strike this time at the Turkish right, in the coastal plain, where his cavalry could be best employed. The Turks, then, had to be convinced that he would attack their left.

During the summer a strong mounted force was kept in the Jordan valley, despite its intense heat and humidity. Raiding columns were sent east of the Jordan. From the desert, Feisal's Arab Regulars and Lawrence's Bedouin raiders threatened the Hejaz Railway and the vital junction at Deraa, behind the Turkish lines. These activities led the enemy to move one-third of his troops to the area where Allenby wanted them! German troops of the special "Asia Corps" were sent into an attack against the British in the Jordan area, a pleasing indication to Allenby that the enemy was nervous about his left: and the reluctance to support this German effort suggested a weakening Turkish morale, if such a sign were needed. The Turks were obviously ragged and half starved, mainly owing to bad organization of supplies and communications; and for a Turk to be half starved means that he is almost completely fasting.

Allenby's final plan was to break the Turkish right in the coastal plain by the main mass of his troops. The cavalry

was then to ride through the Plain of Sharon, and turn eastward through a range of hills into the Plain of Esdraelon some thirty or forty miles in the rear of the Turkish front, thus crossing the enemy's line of communication and his supply railway. Allenby's plan envisaged the destruction of the whole Turkish and German army.

It was a daring plan [Wavell wrote], even against an enemy so inferior in numbers and morale. It would involve a continuous ride of over fifty miles for the majority of the horsemen, and over sixty for some, in the course of which they would have to cross a range of hills in the enemy's possession, passable only by two difficult tracks. There is no parallel in military history to so deep an adventure by such a mass of cavalry against a yet unbroken enemy.

Having laid down the general plan, Allenby left the details of supply and operations to his staffs, aiding, suggesting, co-ordinating plans, and at a series of conferences making the big, final decisions cleanly. Numerous and elaborate devices were used to mislead the enemy and keep his attention riveted on his left. For instance, new camps were made in the Jordan valley, fifteen thousand dummy horses were placed in horse-lines there, and the river was bridged at several new points. Infantry marched towards the Turkish left by day and were brought back by lorries at night. Sleighs drawn by mules made great clouds of dust as though the thousands of dummy horses were going to water. Allenby's H.Q. was a camp in the plains, but another dummy H.Q. was prepared farther east, in Jerusalem, even to the laying of telephone lines and the allotment of offices for various sections. Lawrence's men spread the word that the British would soon need large supplies of forage for the forces in the Jordan district.

Meanwhile the attack troops were being concentrated at the Mediterranean end of the front. Moved from the Jordan valley and the inland hills at night, they were hidden in

woods and orange-groves and were widely dispersed. No movement was allowed by day, and no fires at any time. Horses were watered at the irrigation channels in these groves. No tents were erected, no horse-lines constructed, and the R.A.F. used its superiority to prevent enemy aircraft crossing the front positions. Even the local Palestinians had no idea that this part of the front was packed with troops. Just before the attack, an enemy Intelligence map was captured. Mindful of their own devices, Allenby's staff officers must have studied it with mixed thoughts, but at least it seemed that the enemy was taking the bait, for it noted an increase of British forces in the Jordan valley! Actually only a small force was there, making much of itself through its wireless. On the eve of the battle Allenby had a two-to-one superiority along the front, but at the point of the main attack had built up an advantage of four to one.

Meanwhile the Turkish troops were deluged with propaganda leaflets from aircraft. It was pointed out to them that they had the choice of remaining ill-fed and badly clad under the German command, or of becoming well-fed, decently clothed, and comfortable as prisoners of the British. Photographs showing happy prisoners were dropped to help the decision, and the German commanders began to complain of the number of deserters. The Turkish commanders, subordinates to their unpleasant allies, were uneasy, for long experience of wars in the Balkans, Gallipoli, and Mesopotamia had imbued them with an instinct for a dangerous situation. They suggested retiring to a line farther north, and had this been done Allenby's plan would have been at least temporarily disrupted. Happily, the German Commander-in-Chief vetoed the suggestion.

Allenby was confident of victory, and, as Wavell wrote, the campaign had been practically won before a shot was fired. . . . The patient work of reorganization and training in the summer, the brilliant conception of the Commander, the

handicraft of an experienced staff, had combined to prepare one of the most crushing strokes ever delivered in war.

Lawrence had earlier made an attempt, which failed, to destroy the Yarmuk valley bridge, on a branch of the Hejaz Railway which carried the supplies to the Turkish armies west of the Jordan. Now he made certain of success on the eve of this offensive, when on September 16 he came in with his Arabs from Azrak, in the eastern desert, and cut the railway lines branching out from Deraa. The enemy then sent some of his remaining reserves, soon to be badly needed near the coast, towards this junction. On the night of September 16, Chetwode's Corps (reduced to two divisions) struck in the hills of Judæa, from both ends of its twenty-five-miles front, avoiding the main road which ran through its centre, where the Turks were strong. This movement put the Corps in a good position for an attack on Nablus and gained an important water supply, but its best service was further to distract attention from the intended point of Allenby's blow.

Then, at 4.30 in the morning of September 19, Allenby's artillery spoke, and at the same moment the infantry advanced, for this general had little faith in prolonged bombardment, which warned the enemy. As the battle opened the R.A.F. knocked out the chief Turkish headquarters, smashed communications behind the front, and kept the German airmen on the ground by attacking and patrolling over their aerodromes. The German Commander-in-Chief could get no information, and, as Wavell says, "the arrival next morning of a British cavalry brigade at his headquarters at Nazareth was his earliest intimation that something really serious must have happened to his army." The cavalry only just failed, indeed, to capture the enemy Commander-in-Chief on the first day of the battle, fifty miles behind the Turkish lines.

As the infantry had advanced and stormed a way through

the right of the Turkish line, the cavalry had followed close behind, and by 10 A.M. had begun its great stride to the north. Allenby had gambled on his cavalry getting through the two passes in the hills overlooking Esdraelon before the Turks could block them, or rush reserves there to hold the positions. As one of the Indian cavalry divisions debouched from the hills, it met a Turkish infantry battalion on its way to the passes, and charged at once with the lance. Surprised at encountering fifty miles behind their front line a mass of cavalry full of the offensive spirit, the Turks surrendered with hardly a show of resistance.

The British line was now swinging north-eastward. Wavell and other historians of the campaign have likened the movement to a door swinging on its hinges, the handle being on the coastal plain. When the door was pushed open it blocked the Turkish lines of communication. Wavell writes :

The proper exploitation of victory by mounted troops is an interception rather than a direct pursuit. They should aim to avoid the tail of a retreating column, where the rear-guard's sting lies, and to strike in from a flank on to the line of retirement, cutting off as large a part as possible of the pursued force, and holding it at bay till the infantry can come up and complete the destruction.

Allenby had hoped for this in the Beersheba battle. Now it was being done with stupendous success in the battle called Megiddo—the Armageddon of the Hebrews.

As the cavalry crossed the Turkish lines of retreat, the XX Corps took Nablus in the centre, and the forces in the Jordan valley also advanced. Everywhere the Turks fell back in confusion, and a large part of one of their armies, caught in a narrow defile between Nablus and the Jordan, was destroyed or put out of action by the R.A.F. Lawrence's Arabs also fell upon the disorganized enemy, with great slaughter, while the Arab population joined in, adding

murder. By the twenty-sixth Palestine had been cleared of Turks, and on October 1 the British entered Damascus.

Malaria and influenza now struck the British forces, but Allenby's pursuit continued methodically. From Damascus to Aleppo was two hundred miles, so that the pursuers, thinned out by sickness, were operating far from their bases. The German units fought stoutly in the retreat, and the Turk could be relied upon to defend stubbornly if he were given a fair chance to do so. Moreover, the Turks still possessed some efficient commanders, among them Mustapha Kemal Pasha, the future dictator. But Allenby decided to continue northward, and before the end of the month Aleppo had fallen. On October 31 Turkey was out of the war. In some six weeks Turkey had lost 72,000 prisoners in addition to killed and wounded, 350 guns and 800 machine-guns, great quantities of transport and war equipment, and 4000 of her German allies. The British had advanced three hundred and sixty miles, and one cavalry division had covered five hundred miles.

To Wavell the campaign was not only a demonstration of almost all the arts of generalship, but was also a pointer to the nature of operations in the future. He realized that it might well be the last great battle of horsemen, but that even when mechanical vehicles superseded the horse, the operations would still remain as a lesson in the right use of mobility. The campaign also appeared to him as an outstanding example of the immense advantage won by a general who can conceal his intentions and mislead the enemy until his blow falls with the maximum of weight and surprise. In this aspect of war he saw that air power would be of the highest importance in blinding the enemy. But the basis of Allenby's success, in Wavell's view, lay in the care and constant attention devoted to supply and communications. In fact, he considered the weakness of Turkish communications the chief complementary factor in Allenby's

victory. It was twelve hundred miles from the Bosphorus to the Palestine front, and the Turks were served by a single line, cut by uncompleted tunnels in the Taurus Mountains. For part of its course the line had to carry supplies for Mesopotamia; it had several different gauges; and it was inefficiently organized, with little good feeling between the Turkish and German personnel—for the Germans, as is their habit, despised their allies, and did not conceal their contempt.

To serve in a key staff position in such operations under Allenby was an inspiring experience. When Wavell in later years spoke of generalship one had not to look far to discover an exemplar of almost all the practices he held desirable. He was to write Allenby's biography, and his assessment, "A Study in Greatness," is likely to be accepted by history, more readily because Wavell did not try to conceal his subject's faults and failures, as a soldier or as a man. In the personal aspect of this study, as will be noted later, Wavell drew a picture which surprised many, of all ranks, who had known only the huge, dominating, hard exterior of the great soldier.

After the final victory Wavell had a short leave in England, during which his eldest daughter was born. Returning to Egypt, he became B.G.G.S. at Allenby's H.Q. At this time Lawrence was dissatisfied with the treatment of the Arabs in the peace-making in Paris, and while the Peace Conference was still at work Allenby was warned that Lawrence had disappeared from Paris, and that the French were alarmed, suspecting that he intended to join Feisal in a revolt against the French occupation of Syria. Allenby ordered Wavell to bring Lawrence to him if he should land in Egypt. Wavell took the appropriate steps to have him detained on arrival, although he considered that if Lawrence was making for Syria he would certainly avoid such an obvious route. Weeks later, when Wavell's instructions had probably been

forgotten, Lawrence arrived at Shephard's Hotel—to collect papers he had left there—and was surprised to hear that he was credited with filibustering schemes.

Wavell had met Lawrence in Palestine, though they did not know each other intimately there. Their friendship developed later, when Lawrence was a storeman in the Tank Corps. Then they often met in Dorset and at Wavell's house on Salisbury Plain. Lawrence would answer questions on Eastern politics straightforwardly, if he was asked, but their conversation, says Wavell, was usually on lighter subjects. Just before Lawrence's death they had, however, discussed Lawrence's theory of irregular warfare and the necessary counter-measures. Wavell believed that Lawrence's feat in the Arab Revolt was more spiritual than military, and that no one but Lawrence could have succeeded, however much gold was provided. He once compared Lawrence to a Hamlet, who had slain his uncle neatly and expeditiously at the beginning of Act II, had spent the remainder of the play reporting his action and writing a long explanation of it to Horatio, and had then retired to a monastery.

Wavell remained at Allenby's H.Q. during the rising Egyptian unrest, until 1920, when he rejoined the Black Watch at Cologne in the Army of Occupation. In 1921 he was promoted colonel, after twenty years' service.

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CHAPTER VII

BETWEEN THE WARS

Wavell at thirty-eight—Wavell's poets—The bad years—Disarmament—Training troops—Manœuvres—Wavell on discipline, aims of training, officers, generalship—A gallant officer—David and Goliath—A German opinion—In Russia—Palestine disorders—*Allenby: a Study in Greatness*—Middle East Command

THE veld, the Indian hills, and Flanders had provided Wavell's practical experience, showing him the infantryman's war, the appalling physical and mental weariness, the boredom and nervous strain, and the sudden perils. He had seen all the things that can happen to men in battle, had learned the work of Intelligence in London, Russia, and France, and had carried out the highest staff work for Chetwode and Allenby, the one an able Corps Commander, the other a Commander-in-Chief of genius. Versailles had provided a glimpse into the backstage of war, and Egypt in unrest had opened for him a window on Imperial policy. Thus at the age of thirty-eight he had seen war all the way from the front line to the War Office and the political councils. All this experience was absorbed in the cool, tenacious mind of a man who said little, but observed meticulously, read widely, and formed judgments that were closely reasoned and impartial. These qualities of calmness, balance, and economy are evident in his writings.

In the post-war years he contributed many articles to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, including one under the heading "Army," another on the campaigns in Russia, one on the Seven Weeks' War, and the article "Operations in Palestine." His first book, *The Palestine Campaign*, appeared in 1928. Wavell's style was lucid, plain, and to the point, giving the reader a clear picture of the subject, whether it

was a matter of tactics and strategy, the background of a struggle, or the merits and failures of commanders. These writings were based on his wide experience in war and profound reading of military history. His professional reading was enormous, and was devoted more to a study of the handling of administration, transport, and supply by the great commanders than to their actions when battle was joined; and he could summarize the lessons to be learned in prose of Gallic clarity and order. Much of his leisure reading was in poetry, and he still learned a great deal of it by heart, if it pleased him, even if it was not great poetry. Browning and Kipling remained his first favourites, and their attraction for him reflects the character of the man. "They have courage and humanity, and their feet are usually on the ground." G. K. Chesterton was his third favourite, and then Masfield, who sang of the men of action on land and sea. He enjoyed the poets who, he said, had "their eyes on the stars," but he loved more, and remembered by heart, "the plain gold, silver and metal work" of English poetry.

In 1944, when he was famous, he published an anthology of poems, *Other Men's Flowers*, adding a poem of his own, a "Sonnet for the Madonna of the Cherries," inspired by a painting he had always loved, in which the Madonna and Child are painted against a lovely Flemish background. It is the work of the sixteenth-century Master of "The Death of the Virgin," probably Josef van Cleef the elder. The anthology gave great pleasure in England, in part from the delight of the unexpected. Poetry did not seem to consort with this tough-looking, silent, solid British general, yet here he came discoursing on the sonnets and ballads of war, love, and dreams, in a crisp, amusing, and informative commentary. Years of the memoirs and criticisms of the First World War's affairs had, moreover, left a deep mark on opinion, something more than an impression, that stupidity, callousness, and unshakable distrust of brains were the

characteristics to be expected of high British commanders. By the spring of 1944 Wavell's victories and the work of other generals had begun to convince the public that British generalship and intelligence were no longer strangers to each other. Nevertheless, that this kind of thing should come from Wavell was novel and engaging. The wider public had not read his masterly writings on military history, and simply regarded him as a superb soldier to whom it would always be grateful, but as a silent, grim professional, with possibly no interest beyond war save, probably, the hunting-field. The fact was, of course, that Wavell was far from the type of 'strong, silent man,' which the English had painfully learned to associate with lack of ideas. He was given to listening and to asking questions rather than to the loud voicing of opinion, and he would have been very easy for another Englishman to live with on a desert island; yet when his view was needed he would give it crisply and lucidly, always illuminating the dark corners of a problem, and was ever open to new ideas. In speech as in writing, however, he was economical, and no one took less advantage of rank to be dogmatic in the company of subordinates.

In the years following the First World War Wavell was engaged in staff duties at the War Office and as G.S.O.1. of the Third Division, commanded by Sir John Burnett-Stuart, from whom he learned much that he was able to apply and develop when he reached the rank of brigadier in 1930. The higher commanders in these years regarded Wavell as one of the outstanding staff officers in the Army, inevitably destined for advancement. However, for a period of almost twenty years after 1918 the future was hardly bright for professional soldiers, for a creed widely held in England, though challengeable by the slightest reading of history, was that wars profited victors as little as vanquished. Oxford students pledged themselves never to fight for King and

Country, and meant it at the time. The nation had no objection to the dissolution of its armed forces, and a start was made by practically eliminating the Royal Air Force, mighty in size and spirit. Fortunately, the whole process was not completed, though Army and Navy were whittled into splinters. Pacifist propaganda, collective security, enthusiasm for the League of Nations after it had frequently failed in tasks for which it was not fitted, the manoeuvres of politicians who put party first under the guise of high principles, and an apathetic public which allowed Germany to rearm while neglecting its own defence, were some of the marks of those years. Writing of that period in relation to its poetry, of which he voiced the opinion which many share but do not express for fear of being judged 'lowbrow,' Wavell described it as one best forgotten, a time when "the spirit grew tired and disillusioned and the body slack and soft."

In the nineteen-twenties he was not impressed by the suggestions made for the international reduction of armaments. It was agreed by the enthusiasts, who had not then been let off the chain, that reductions would have to affect all countries and be proportional, for the movement had not yet reached the point where British disarmament proceeded while German factories were working the clock round. Yet even then Wavell pointed out that proportional disarmament involved a standard of comparison, and that difficulties would arise, for instance, in assessing the value of long-service, volunteer forces against that of short-service, conscript armies, or of battalions of tanks against regiments of cavalry. Investigation and supervision of each country's preparations also suggested difficulties to a staff officer's mind, which has to examine the execution of projects which may be desirable in theory but difficult or impossible in practice. Again, Wavell pointed out that in all the talk of reducing armaments to the lowest levels, it should be

remembered that future wars would involve the application of all a nation's resources, and that some of these, such as population, raw materials, financial and industrial strength, were not limitable. To the argument that a nation with such resources did not need a strong peace-time army Wavell replied that in the wars of the future a nation might be ruined by a sudden blow before it could organize and harness its resources.

He wrote no more than a few lines on this subject, and at a time when Germany's defeat was so recent that her possible military resurrection interested no one. Yet he uttered what must have been one of the earliest warnings against complacency, when he indicated that new ideas in military science might emerge in Germany. "Defeat is a more fertile mother of reforms than victory." In his forecast of the 'total' character of future war, of the possibility of a great nation being speedily struck down, and of a new style of warfare developing in Germany, the Wavell of twenty years ago did not lack vision.

At Aldershot from 1930 to 1934 Wavell commanded the 6th Infantry Brigade, was promoted Major-General in 1933, and for two years commanded the Second Division. In both commands his imagination and insight were applied to devising and encouraging new ideas and methods of training. His fellow-pupil of Summerfields, Buchanan, was a brigadier at Aldershot at the same time, and their brigades were often on opposing sides at manœuvres. Buchanan says of Wavell:

He was one of the outstanding trainers of troops, and introduced a humour and liveliness which were greatly appreciated. I used to meet many of Wavell's officers, and they were all of one voice, that they were learning something all the time from him.

Wavell set out to produce a fresh, vigorous interest in exercises which had usually been boring because they were

necessarily artificial. A well-known example of his schemes was that which involved the rescue of a beautiful princess (played by a young private) who was saved and lost again several times. Hundreds of men were held interested by the unfolding story, for they were kept informed of the objects of their marches and skirmishes. The old motto on which Kitchener's army was trained, "You're not paid to think; the Army thinks for you," was being erased. The introduction of an intelligent interest in the work, as Major-General Collins recalled in a B.B.C. broadcast, developed in the 6th Brigade an astonishing readiness for field practice, and its brigadier could always be relied upon to produce an exciting or romantic theme. The revival of a vigorous attention to training was becoming general in the Army in the early thirties, a new freshness and life in ideas of training. Irregular warfare was studied and practised in some brigades. Liddell Hart described Aldershot during this period as alive with Boer commandos and men with a price on their heads—or rather, with their price on a label in their pockets! One of Wavell's schemes was summed up in the heading, a quotation from Mr Dooley, "'Tis only armies that fight in the open. Nations fight behind trees and rocks." The interest in training was widespread, and there were other bright minds to sustain the activities of the 6th Brigade when Wavell was taken from training for such tasks as reconnoitring the Haifa pipe-line, or writing the current version of "Field Service Regulations."

At certain manoeuvres Wavell's brigade was given the task of destroying a pipe-line. There were four possible points of attack, and Wavell tried to mislead his adversary by feints at two of them, while dispersing his forces widely during the approach to his real objective. The feints had no effect, for mist prevented his opponent's aircraft from seeing them and gathering the information which Wavell wanted the opposing staff to imbibe. Yet because of his skilful dispersal of

forces the defenders remained so uncertain of his intentions that his leading battalion was able to filter through, overwhelm machine-gun positions, and enable following battalions to go forward without artillery preparation and seize a section of the pipe-line. Even when part of the opposing force and its commander were taken prisoner, the remainder was still so misled by Wavell's approach that its counter-measures were useless.

Wavell believed that the existing Army divisions were too large and cumbrous and that they should be replaced by smaller, more mobile formations. To draw attention to his point, at manœuvres he once encumbered his division with all the transport and equipment laid down by regulations. It covered fifteen miles of road and caused a traffic block. Old ideas died hard, and there was a need, as Wavell said, for the Army to "get the last of the Flanders mud out of its brain."

His *Britannica* articles, his lectures at the Royal United Service Institution in 1933 and 1935, and those at Cambridge University in 1939, were marked by a deep knowledge of the practice and history of war, an appreciation of the human factors in soldiering, a crisp wit, and kindly irony. Some of these lectures dealt with technical organization of training; here one may only summarize a few of his ideas and conclusions, beginning with his view of discipline and his aims in training infantry.

The oldest method of inculcating discipline, said Wavell, was by close-order drill; but this was not its true foundation. Real discipline, in his opinion, derived more from the lecture-room, the education hut, and the playing-field than from the barrack-square. It existed "when one or two are gathered together and there is courage and enterprise in them." The soldier, Wavell held, should be trained, by such things as scout lore and finding his way by night, to think for himself; and he should be constantly encouraged to

cultivate initiative. He described the practice of detailing an N.C.O. to overlook a few men at some job as a great wasting of time, and as likely to take the edge off a keen N.C.O. The aim of infantry training, according to Wavell, should be to make the men act for themselves, to make them "war-worthy" on their own account, and not simply "scavengers to their artillery and jackals to their tanks." The playing-field he saw not as an arena of competition, but as a means of developing spirit and physique. Formal physical training, he held, should not be an end in itself, but should be directed to the requirements of the various arms in war. Wavell summed up his ideal infantryman as one who combined the qualities of cat-burglar, poacher, and ~~gambler~~ *gambler*.

Wavell believed that an officer needed a good general education and a broad outlook, in addition to the standards of knowledge and qualities of leadership officially required. He urged that the existing schemes for exchanging officers between different branches of the Services should be made compulsory, so that officers could gain a more comprehensive view of military operations. He also advocated an organization to help officers to pass their leaves in climbing, ski-ing, walking, travelling in tramp steamers, flying, or studying civic institutions at first hand. He believed that an officer who spent his leave working with some welfare organization could learn something of the outlook, problems, and psychology of his fellow-countrymen; and that officers should try to acquire this knowledge seemed to him obviously important, since the mass of the citizens would be the raw material of future war.

Wavell was one of the first to stress the urgency for the Army of a thorough grasp of the workings and potentialities of the R.A.F. For senior commanders he held this knowledge to be vital. Flying in general he regarded as a good sport for officers, as it demanded resource, nerve, quick decision, and an eye for country. An officer, he once said,

should possess "mobility of mind and mobility of body." And again: "The ideal officer must be afraid of nothing—not even of a new idea." Wavell produced a wealth of ideas for brightening training, when he was speaking to audiences of his own profession, and used to stress that a brigade exercise should not end with the brigade conference, urging that the lessons learned should be noted and discussed in the battalions. Discussion of an exercise was to him a criterion of its value.

If the exercise is subsequently discussed in the officers' mess, it was probably worth while; if there is an argument over it in the sergeants' mess, it was a good exercise; while if it is mentioned in the corporals' room it was an undoubted success.

If the troops were interested in the exercise he held that it could be taken that they had profited, and he wanted exercises to teach something to all ranks.

When he lectured at Cambridge his name was hardly known beyond the Army, and many very intelligent people in the University did not trouble to hear him. Perhaps they would have attended, even at less witty, ironic, and illuminating lectures, had they realized that a piquant situation was developing. A general was putting on record his views on generalship and great generals of the past, and was almost at once to be given the opportunity of demonstrating his own performance.

Among the first essentials for a general, in Wavell's judgment, were a robust physique and a robust mind fitted to support him in "the rough and very dirty game of war," in which men's lives are at stake and a strong mind is needed to bear the strain of responsibility. Courage, health, and youth were desirable, for the modern general had to go "to see for himself" on reconnaissances by air and land. Of these desirable qualities, health was a relative matter, for

Wavell preferred a sick Napoleon to many of his opponents in good health! Age was a matter of the brain rather than the body; but it was Wavell's view that a general's career should begin between the ages of forty and forty-five, or ten years earlier in war-time.

A general, said Wavell, should have character, "which means knowing what he wants and being determined to get it." He should have a genuine interest in and knowledge of humanity, the raw material of his craft. He should have the fighting spirit and be the type who in a game always comes back fighting. A commander, he said, should not try to do his own staff work, but should not allow his staff to come between him and the troops. He should know the troops well, but should not risk an address to them, unless he could be certain of saying the right thing—for a speech might cost him a hard-won reputation! The troops, he said, could do without oratory or humour from their general; what they demanded was efficiency, fairness, justice, and the few comforts in food, clothing, and billets which might be expected in war. An inspiring personality might be helpful, but the troops could manage without that also. Given an army trained and hardened for war, said Wavell, the general could drive it hard in the field. "The horse should be cared for in the stable as if he were worth £500. But he should be ridden in the field as if he were not worth half a crown." The troops, he believed, would bear with and even admire a tough, hard leader if they knew he was working in their interests.

A modern general, Wavell pointed out, needed more technical knowledge than those of old, for he had to be familiar with the potentialities of wireless, smoke, armoured vehicles, camouflage, chemical warfare, military engineering, and propaganda. Above all he must be able to handle air forces with the same knowledge as of forces on land. It was immaterial to him whether the commander was a soldier who

had studied air forces, or an airman who had studied land warfare; but the two-fold knowledge was vital. Yet to Wavell the marks of the great general in all ages were seen in his ability to move and supply troops in the war area and in his knowledge of topography: and these attributes of a general, in movement, supply and topography, were developed only by experience and deep reflection. Napoleon's mind, said Wavell, contained a detailed picture of the river-valleys, hills, mountains, and woods of all Europe and an exact knowledge of the roads, and distances between places. Wellington also, in the Peninsular War, was aided in marches and counter-marches against superior numbers by his memory for topography and his organization of supply and transport. Marlborough, Wavell considered, would probably have failed at Blenheim but for his care for supply in the long movement from the Rhine to the Danube.

Wavell held that a general should be willing to take great risks for great gains—that he should possess the gambler's touch. Finally, he believed that generals and statesmen should study each other's technique, to avoid the differences that arose between them in war. The soldier should understand the political preparation required for legislation, and the practical measures necessary to apply it; while the statesman should study the mechanics of war, such as the time and transport needed to move troops, and the influences of climate and geography on operations, factors which might make a statesman's good strategical idea impracticable.

Writings and lectures revealed Wavell's vast knowledge of the history and problems of high command, and he was no less well equipped to appreciate the skill and bravery of the junior commanders which supports generalship. He had seen countless exhibitions of courage, so it is interesting to note that, of officers who rose to high rank, he considered Sir Rollo Gillespie as one of the bravest officers who ever served in the British Army. This officer of Light Dragoons

was a tiny man with a big spirit and good brains. His active service began at the end of the eighteenth century in the West Indies, which was then a grave for the Army even in time of peace. On one occasion, when eight bandits entered his house, Gillespie killed six of them with his sabre—fighting in his night-shirt! Under much provocation he once fought a duel, on his own extraordinary terms—with pistols, at arm's length. After many adventures in the Middle East on the way to India, he repressed a Sepoy mutiny at Vellore by prompt and almost single-handed action and superb courage. In Java he displayed unequalled fearlessness, but he possessed something beyond the dash and courage that once led him to ride down and kill a fully grown tiger with a hog-spear, for he was devoted to his men's welfare far beyond the custom of his time, and, indeed, cared for them in the deadly West Indian climate as though each man were his own son. He was a skilful trainer of troops, and though not a great commander was careful and thorough in preparation for battle, cool and precise in executing his plans. He was so well loved that when he was being transferred to another command the ill-paid men wanted to present him with a two-hundred-guinea sword. "Brother soldiers," said Gillespie; "the sword you offer is of too great value. Let it be less so, and without any ornament, but the inscription 'The Gift of the Royal Irish,' which will make it more valuable to me than were it covered with gold." In one of his essays Sir John Fortescue revived memory of Gillespie, an early exemplar of the qualities which the British Army seeks in its officers.

Reviewing movements and tendencies in the army since 1918, Wavell, in an article in 1930, concluded with a short forecast. Whereas in the past, he wrote, armies had interposed between the enemy and the civil population, in future the air weapon and mechanization might mean that the nation would from the first be open to shock. Soldiers and

statesmen would have to study civil organization, the morale of the citizens, and the needs of home defence. The mobilization of the whole nation would begin at once, and it might be necessary to issue protection against gas over a large area. As for the Army, he believed that as masses of unarmoured men would have no offensive power, first-line troops would be mechanized and armoured. This process would be expensive and would involve much training, so that first-line armies, containing light troops trained to fight in areas unsuitable to mechanized forces, would probably be small and highly specialized. Behind this army there would have to be a large defensive force, based on national service. Overhanging all, he wrote in this 1930 article, was the air arm, "unproved, incalculable," and though some of its claims were exaggerated and unjustified, its influence was growing, and Britain's centres of government and industry were open to attack and difficult to defend. Britain, Wavell said, would have to develop civil aviation as a basis of success in future war, and especially the Empire air routes, which demanded large passenger aircraft. These in war could be used for carrying troops and could be converted into bombers.

The strategy of mechanized forces, he considered, would have much in common with naval strategy. Tactically, mechanized forces would be handled on much the same lines as cavalry. He advised high commanders therefore to study naval strategy and the exploits and precepts of the great cavalry leaders. Britain, Wavell wrote, had great advantages in evolving a mechanized army. She had long-service, professional troops, a highly organized mechanical industry, and since the invention of the tank had led the way in the development of armoured forces and their tactics.

In the years immediately after the First World War, when British Governments would not even consider expenditure on the Army, and the lessons of the war were still quite

unassimilated, Wavell's writings reveal him as one of the few who foresaw the immense possibilities of tracked, mechanized vehicles in the development of warfare. The use of the petrol engine, he wrote then, had at first merely filled the battlefield with more and heavier equipment, packing the back areas with transport tied to the roads. But mechanical vehicles that could travel across country promised to revive two old factors in war, namely armour and the use of shock tactics. The way of a mechanized force that could move across country might become as "the way of a ship in the midst of the sea." Such forces, he believed, might end the stalemate of the battlefield and, by bringing manœuvre back into warfare, might free battles from the obsession of mere numbers. "From mechanized forces," he wrote, "may be born a David to slay a Goliath." In this view he was the prophet of his own future!

In the controversy at that time between Army, Navy, and Air Force, in which the two first desired their own air arms for co-operation, Wavell's view was that the separate R.A.F. was justified by the conviction of those best qualified to judge that independent action by the air weapon might be decisive in future wars. In the field in which he was himself well qualified to judge he was from the beginning a champion of mechanization and armour. To take but one small example, he supported the introduction of the Bren carrier, which became one of the most useful of the earlier armoured vehicles. The Germans listed him as an officer exceptional in this sense. General Keitel, for instance, wrote of him in *Deutsche Wehr*:

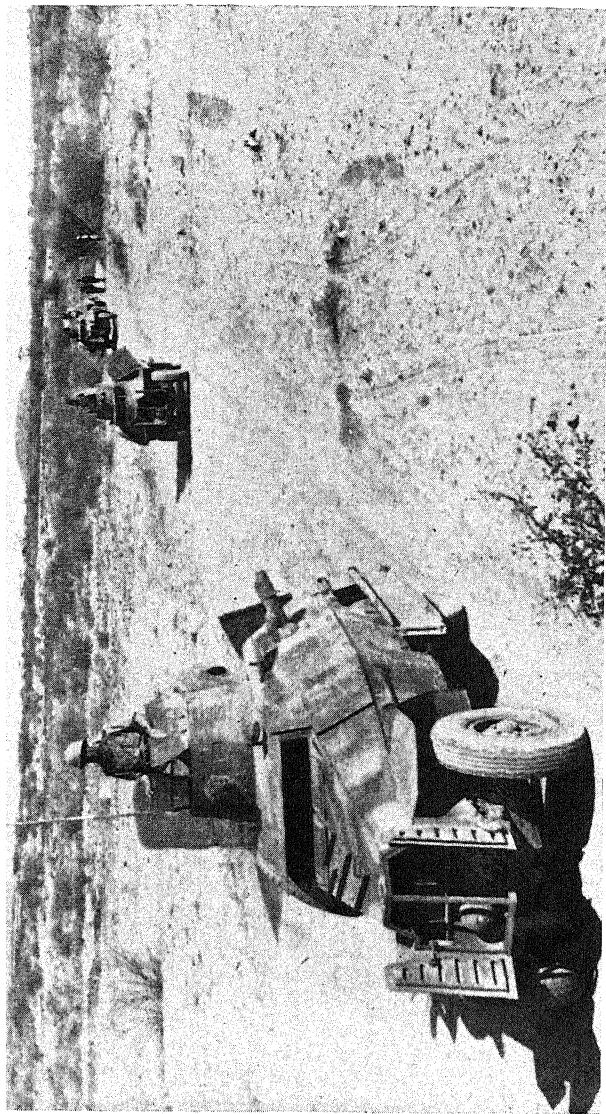
In the British Army to-day there is only one good general, but he is incomparably good. The others have no proper conception of the direction of mechanized war, but this officer, from 1928 onward, has studied the subject, and he may well prove the dominant personality in any war within the next five years.



KEREN REGION, FROM THE AIR

[See page 171.]

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SOUTH AFRICAN ARMoured CARS, ABYSSINIAN CAMPAIGN

[See page 174.]

Photo South African Press Services

That was written in 1939.

Three years earlier Wavell had visited Russia, and on his return to England spoke plainly in praise of the Red Army. Most people took his utterances as mere expressions of politeness to his recent hosts, especially when he stated his admiration for the Russian development of parachute troops. He was of 'news interest' to reporters simply because he had seen the Red Army. No British general had much standing with national opinion at that time, and no strong impression was made on the ordinary newspaper reader by Wavell's opinions. One cannot find that Wavell was ever asked his opinion of Red Army discipline, or how it compared with that of the old Russian Army; but this is his view:

When I saw the Red Army in 1936 I thought its spirit extremely good, and the relations between officers and men a good deal closer than in the old Army. I was very much struck by the discipline; a captain addressing a corporal or a private would call him Comrade; but Comrade Corporal or Comrade Private sprang smartly to attention and went about the business at once. I came to the conclusion in Russia that the morale of the new Red Army was higher than that of the old Tsarist Army.

In 1937 Wavell was appointed to the command in Palestine and Transjordan. Palestine is important not only to Jews and Arabs, but to Great Britain for strategic reasons. There is no need to discuss the causes of the quarrel between Arabs and Jews, for Wavell's work was military, to deal with disorders caused by bands which had taken up arms. Villages were occupied by police and troops, to keep the rebels in the open country, military courts were set up, and mobile forces and infantry columns kept the bands on the move. By the end of 1937 the area of disorder was cleared. When trouble began again larger mobile columns were employed, the R.A.F. was brought into co-operation with the land forces,

and once more order was restored. Wavell was a commander always ready for peace, impartial towards the political aspects, but resolute to enforce order in the interests of all.

When the process of reforming the Army and preparing it for modern war was at last officially begun Wavell was recalled and appointed to the Southern Command. In 1939 he was knighted. There had been no title in the Wavell family for nearly six hundred years, for the last Wavell knight had been Sir John Wavell, a Member of Parliament for Sussex and Sheriff of Sussex and Surrey, in the fourteenth century.

The command in Palestine may have recalled much to Wavell, helping him in the biography of Allenby on which he was working at the time. The first volume appeared in 1940 with the title *Allenby: A Study in Greatness*. The second volume, three years later, was named *Allenby in Egypt*. As Allenby is usually regarded as Wavell's exemplar in the craft of war, it may be well to examine his study. The book interested a great public, as hundreds of thousands of British and Imperial troops had not only served under Allenby, but knew him by sight; for Allenby had the 'front-line' habit to a greater degree than any other high commander. Wavell resembled his former chief in being unable to deal thoroughly with a situation without seeing it for himself. Allenby was always on the heels of the advancing troops, or visiting bases, hospitals, and depots. Thus he was not merely a name to the troops, as were so many officers of his own or lesser rank.

Most men saw him simply as a huge figure of a man, rather terrifying and harsh in manner, a stickler for the letter of regulations, and given to violent outbursts of temper over things that sometimes seemed trivial. He was, to all appearances, a hard, tough soldier, and not endowed with much human kindness. His nickname, "The Bull," appeared to

fit him perfectly. Wavell's book deals with the man and the soldier. To Wavell, Allenby's greatest failing as a commander lay in this violent temper and in his rigidity in personal contacts. It was not realized that he seldom punished except by words, and that no other commander dismissed fewer senior officers, but his aloofness made it difficult for some of his senior officers in France to have full confidence in him; and in conferences with his equals and seniors on the Western Front he was slow in debate with 'slicker' men. Wavell shows how misleading was Allenby's manner, how patient his attitude to even moderate efficiency, and illustrates his loyalty to superiors, his trust in subordinates, his complete honesty and directness. It is clear from Wavell's narrative that Allenby's motive in all he did was that of duty, and that he completely lacked any personal ambition. Neither praise nor adverse criticism interested him, for he regarded any task he was allotted simply as a thing to be done to the best of his ability; when it was completed, Wavell writes, he held no post-mortems; there was praise for all who had helped him, and there, for Allenby, the affair was ended. Lawrence was never as close to Allenby as was Wavell, but he was enormously impressed by him, recognizing a stronger and greater man than himself. Had he worked closer to Allenby he would have discovered also a sensitive, scholarly mind, enriched by wide reading and observation. The rugged, dominating soldier possessed, for instance, an exquisite appreciation of flowers and birds, and could express it. He wrote from the veld during the South African War:

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I should like you to see the Kaffir-Boom in flower. The flower comes on before the leaves; and the tree is like a big fig-tree, clothed in brilliant, scarlet, sweet-pea flowers. It glares in the bush like a red lamp.

In a railway-siding in Palestine he wrote of birds:

There are larks, wheatears, shrikes, bee-eaters, hawks, vultures. Flamingoes frequent the mouths of the wadis. There is a merry bird, the rufous warbler, who haunts the locality. He is pert and friendly. Looks like a big nightingale, has the manners of a robin, and flirts his tail like a redstart.

In all the technique of war, from the administration of supply and transport to the superb use of deception and mobility in the field, Wavell places Allenby among the great commanders. Handicapped in various ways while in a subordinate position in France, the independent command in Palestine allowed Allenby's genius to expand, and leave its mark on military history. Despite his admiration for Allenby, Wavell never overstates his case, and, indeed, even his incidental line-sketches of other commanders of the First World War are more convincing than some of the more elaborate portraits. His impartiality only strengthens the conclusion that Allenby was a great mind and the finest British soldier of his time. Wavell's ideals of generalship, and his practice when the occasion arrived, were based on the theory and action of all the renowned commanders; yet observing and working with so great a general, in two victorious campaigns, must have been a large part of his education in high command. Before the second volume of the biography appeared Wavell himself had won a place among the great soldiers.

In 1939 he was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Middle East. This position gave him control of an area stretching from the Sea of Galilee to Lake Victoria, and from the western limits of the Sudan to the Gulf of Aden. All lesser commands were subordinate, so that the Commander-in-Chief could make the most flexible disposition of available forces according to the situation, and the War Office could deal with one central authority, which could also concert plans with more smoothness and security with the French in Syria, and, if necessary, with the Turks. Never mentioned

in unfriendly assessments of Mr Chamberlain's Ministry, the grand conception of a single Command in this key area was realized just in time on the eve of the German invasion of Poland. The Middle East Command included Egypt, the Sudan, Palestine, Transjordan, British Somaliland, and Cyprus.

In the first weeks of war the British nation was assured that it possessed the best-balanced Cabinet in Europe, with each Minister supremely adapted to his post, for the Cabinet quadrilles had not then started, and there was a well-meant campaign to build up confidence in a Government which had been adversely criticized after the first raptures of Chamberlain's return from Munich. The military commanders also were bravely lauded, but Wavell's name was hardly mentioned. There seemed no likelihood that the Middle East would become a main theatre of war, and beyond the Army and students of war who had read his articles or heard his lectures, he was almost unknown. Even had he not avoided publicity, this must have been pleasing to Wavell, for, lacking public fame, he could not provide an anticlimax. Blessed at that time was the man who had no history.

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CHAPTER VIII

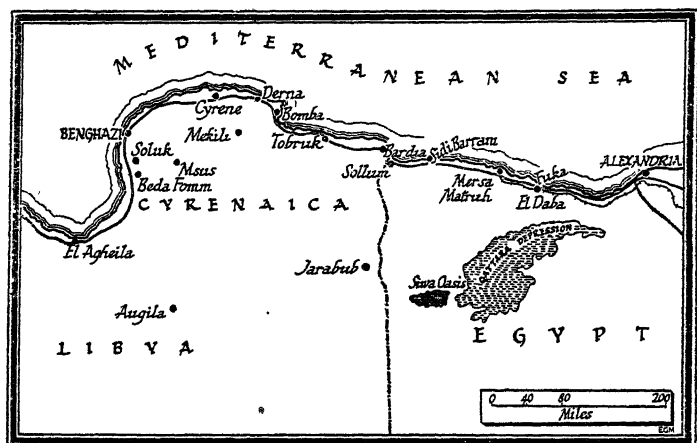
MIDDLE EAST

British weakness—The Italian Armies—Reinforcement and supply—The Western Desert—Frontier operations—"Desert-worthy"—Graziani at Sidi Barrani—The Sudan frontier—Invasion of British Somaliland—Italian invasion of Greece—Action at Gallabat—The Western Desert, November—Attaining surprise—Impressions of Wavell—Eve of the Battle—The Gap—Victory at Sidi Barrani—Sollum, Bardia—"Electric Whiskers"—The capture of Tobruk—Decision to exploit success—Italian retreat intercepted—Benghazi—Destruction of an army—The work of the Long Range Desert Group—Basis of Wavell's success—Lessons of the campaign—Aid to Greece—Retreat from Cyrenaica—Tobruk—Value of intervention in Greece and defence of Crete

AS the link between East and West, Egypt has always possessed the greatest importance in commerce and war, and has thus always been an object of conquest, from the time of the Persians, Greeks, and Romans of the ancient world until to-day. The construction of the Suez Canal multiplied Egypt's value, especially to Britain, with her Dominions in the Southern Hemisphere, her Empire in India, her colonies in Africa, and world trade. Thus when Egypt was given independence, Britain reserved the right to defend the canal, while guaranteeing its use by all nations.

The Middle Eastern position presented a Commander-in-Chief with many anxieties. The Egyptian Government wanted to avoid involvement in the war, although when war came it caused no trouble, and although the Egyptian Army did not fight, it helped the British in many ways. In Palestine there had been the recent disorders, and for years Italian propaganda had sought to embarrass Britain in the Arab

world. Again, Egypt had a large Italian population, which raised problems of security. The French armies in North Africa, Syria, and Djibouti were in 1939 regarded as the main prop of the Allied position in the Middle East, but as one of the best-informed soldiers in Europe, Wavell must



EGYPT AND CYRENAICA

have realized the political weakness of France. His anxieties, however, even before France fell and Italy entered the war, must have centred mainly on the British military position.

Although Egypt was a vital point in the British world structure, Wavell's forces for defence were meagre. To hold the Western Desert, between the Nile and Italian Libya, there were in the beginning probably not more than 8000 men available. In addition to British armoured forces, there were the headquarters and one brigade of the 4th Indian Division, and a second brigade arrived shortly after war began. Reinforcements trickled piecemeal into the Middle East. It was not until February 1940 that one Australian infantry brigade and one New Zealand brigade arrived, and

both were insufficiently trained and not available for operations until the end of the year or the beginning of 1941. In the spring of 1940 in the whole Middle East Command there were less than 36,000 troops, European and Indian, with a few obsolescent tanks and less than half a dozen batteries of artillery. By treaty with Egypt the R.A.F. could not be reinforced till war began, and by the middle of 1940, in this key position, there were only three or four squadrons of Gladiators and five or six Blenheim squadrons. It was fortunate that Italy remained 'non-belligerent' for the first months, for there were large, well-equipped Italian armies west and south of Egypt.

In Libya there was an army of 290,000 men, with at least 1400 cannon, some 800 tanks, 15,000 machine-guns and thousands of lorries. Italian aircraft were more modern and far more numerous than those at Wavell's disposal. In Italian East Africa, including Abyssinia, there were some 300,000 European and native troops, with 400 guns and 200 aircraft. The Europeans were Regulars and Blackshirts who were expected to fight well; the colonial troops were well-trained and courageous, and the Eritreans at least were expected to stand loyally by the Italians. Against this large army the British had three United Kingdom battalions, to defend Khartum, Port Sudan, and Atbara, and a Sudan Defence Force of 4500 men to cover a frontier of twelve hundred miles. In all, there were some 7000 troops, with seven aircraft and no tanks. Two squadrons, one with obsolete aircraft, were held at Port Sudan to protect shipping in the Red Sea. There was one gun available, a 4.5 howitzer, used at Khartum for firing salutes. "Some one," Wavell said, "found that there were a few rounds of H.E. in the arsenal, so the gun was manned and sent to the front." When the 5th Indian Division arrived it was sent to the Sudan.

As the Germans swept through France, and Italy declared

war in June 1940, the French forces in North Africa, Syria, and the important strategic position of Djibouti, decided to obey the German-influenced Pétain Government, and refused to fight Germans or Italians, so that the whole defence of the Middle East devolved on Wavell's slender forces. Italy had now nothing to fear from the French North African army and could concentrate against Egypt. Moreover, Germany and Italy were looking towards the Balkans and the Levant, and could discount the French forces in Syria. For the British, the passage of the Mediterranean at once became difficult, but the way through the Indian Ocean was open, so that India and the Dominions could send help to the Middle East.

After Dunkirk England was threatened with invasion, and the factories were working round the clock to replace the equipment lost in Belgium and France. But after Wavell had been home for consultations Churchill decided to send reinforcements for the Middle East, both through the hazardous Mediterranean and by the long Cape route. It was a heroic decision, to send men and material—including aircraft, a small number of heavy tanks, and some of the superb 25-pounder guns—but a sound strategic decision. In the ensuing Middle East campaigns supply was to be the fundamental problem. The enemy had to use a comparatively short though perilous sea-route: most of the British supplies went the twelve-thousand-mile sea voyage round the Cape. There was a shortage of shipping, and in addition, as the war proceeded, the British had to send supplies to Malta, India, Australia, Greece, and Russia. The race of supplies was not finally won by the British until 1942, and the merchant seamen must be awarded a large part of the credit for the eventual British triumphs. Often on sections of their routes they could be only lightly convoyed, for the failure of the French obliged the Navy to guard the Western as well as the Eastern Mediterranean. The outpost of Malta, for instance,

had relied upon the protection of Bizerta, and now had to meet the enemy's concentrated strength: and as air protection Malta had at first only four 'sea-Gladiators,' intended to be flown from carriers and now uncrated to be used from land. Their four pilots had never before flown a fighter. The seamen who ran the supplies through these waters could only 'take' the air and submarine attack, and curse the politicians and disarmament theorists who had allowed the growth of Germany's mighty weapons and neglected our own. But supplies went through. Although active and audacious in the Central Mediterranean, the Navy could neither bring the British merchant ships through scatheless, nor stop more than a part of the enemy stream of supplies to North Africa from Italy and Sicily.

Through the perils of the Mediterranean, and by the Atlantic and Indian Oceans, men and equipment reached the Middle East slowly in the autumn of 1940. But such was then the disparity between the British and Italian strength that it has often been said that Wavell was beaten, on paper, before a shot was fired. Even by November neutral observers would have given heavy odds against a British survival in Egypt.

II

The desert stretches inland for a thousand miles and from the Nile westward for twelve hundred miles. The Mediterranean edge of this vast region was the main theatre of the great battles for Egypt. Here the coastline is flat and marked by white dunes of sand worn from the limestone reefs offshore. Inland for a few miles there is enough earth among sand and rocks to allow a little dried-up vegetation, but the appearance of the desert as a whole is arid and featureless. Mild north winds could make the place tolerable, but south winds in summer came with a hot blast from the inner desert,

carrying suffocating masses of dust and sand. At any time dust-storms arose, so thick that drivers could not see the ground a few feet ahead. In winter there were often biting cold and rain, when the earth turned to mud.

Inland from the flat reaches of the coast rose an escarpment which approached close to the sea at Sollum, and beyond was the plateau of stony desert, where the scarce water from the natural drainage was collected in cisterns, or *birs*, in the hard ground. All the wide coastal area could support only a slight population, mostly nomadic. For hundreds of miles further into North Africa there lay the sandy desert—an ocean of sand, marked by huge dunes covering thousands of square miles. West of Egypt, for instance, one of these dune regions ran for six hundred miles, with a breadth of one hundred and fifty miles. It was generally believed impassable for motor vehicles, but the British were to operate through and beyond it.

Dust and sandstorms, heat, rain, mud, and great cold, were only a few of the trials of desert life. There was also the inescapable plague of flies. A lorry would stop in the desert where there was no sign of any kind of life from horizon to horizon; but no sooner did the men alight and begin to prepare a meal than the clouds of flies appeared, clustering on their mugs of tea and tins of 'bully,' swarming over their faces and hands, and into their ears and mouths. Most men also suffered at some time from 'gypsy tummy,' a form of dysentery which doubled a man up more certainly than a blow on the stomach from a champion heavyweight. But the main problem of life in the desert was the lack of water. In rocky substrata there were reservoirs which had been used by the Romans, and these the British uncovered and repaired to store water for use in the campaigns. A good deal of water was also carried by the mechanized forces, but not enough for large forces of men in battle, and for tens of thousands of men, marching and fighting in such a terrain,

an unfailing and supple organization of water-supply is vital. The British were aided in this respect by the Navy, despite the lack of good ports along the coast, and the reefs which made landings difficult except in calms. Mersa Matruh, Sollum, and Italian Bardia and Tobruk were only small harbourages, and the next real port westward from Alexandria was Benghazi. The coastal road to Sidi Barrani, the single line of railway to Mersa Matruh, and the Navy, could not carry enough water, as they had to be used for all other supplies, and Wavell had to plan for operations and larger armies than he possessed in the first months of war. Each man in the desert needed half a gallon a day for his total requirements, and each radiator half a gallon. A pipe-line was begun, with pipe supplied by the Iraqi oil-fields, to carry filtered water from the City of Alexandria's system to the desert front. It is suggestive of the range of administrative problems confronting Wavell that on this one matter of the pipe-line a fascinating book has been written. Labour in the desert was scarce, and the officer in charge of construction, with a staff of two subalterns and a dozen sappers, had to depend at first on a screeching gaggle of desert-dwellers, who, he writes, had never before lifted anything heavier than a shepherd's staff. By December 1940 the pipe-line had reached Daba, a hundred miles from Alexandria, and was saving five hundred tons of railway freight daily. From that point the water was carried by railway and lorries to Matruh. During the summer the railway was extended by sidings to deal with more traffic, and men were trained to run the eastern end of the line, to replace Egyptian personnel who were not expected to remain in the front area.

For all other supplies the desert forces depended on the railway, the road, and the coastal units of the Navy. Beyond the road terminus to Sollum there was only a dusty, bumpy track to the frontier, beyond which a good Italian road began its course along the Libyan and Tripolitanian coast.

In the interior traffic moved along tracks which were soon torn up and rutted, so that as vehicles became more numerous drivers avoided the old tracks and formed new ones, and in all directions the surface became scarred and torn, and great clouds of dust accompanied all movement.

No large modern armies had ever fought over such country. Much had to be foreseen and much learned by experience. In the summer and early autumn of 1940, while Wavell was making all possible preparations, it seemed to many that the large Italian armies beyond the Western Desert, and those far to the south facing the Sudan, held Egypt within a nutcracker. Why the Italians did not at once exert the necessary pressure has never been fully explained, though some of the factors contributing to their hesitancy are known.

III

In the summer of 1940 it seemed that two factors might delay the attack on Egypt. In the first place, despite Mussolini's frequent references to the martial Roman spirit, Italy might not be ready to take the offensive at once; secondly, although Egypt offered unusual opportunities for espionage, it might be possible to mislead the enemy as to the extent of British weakness in men and material. Wavell meanwhile would have to play for time to receive further strength. The thin forces at the frontier were therefore ordered to spread themselves out and, by a maximum of movement and aggressive activity, to give the impression of numbers and strength.

The British began at once, in June, by passing through the thick belt of wire by which the Italians had marked the Libyan frontier, raiding enemy posts, destroying telegraph lines, and studying the enemy's movements, habits, and equipment. From the beginning the raiders maintained the

initiative, and, indeed, for some time the Italians were unable to reach their own frontier. Convoys of troops were attacked, lorries carrying ammunition were destroyed or captured, and numbers of prisoners were brought back. Frontier forts were captured and held for a short time. When the enemy reoccupied one of them he was shelled from the sea, and British patrols cut the water pipe-line connecting the fort with Bardia twelve miles away. Swift night raids with grenade and bayonet caused the Italians further alarm. Lorries carrying Italian rations were intercepted. The British raiders penetrated deeply into Libya, and on one occasion, when British cruisers were shelling Tobruk about a hundred miles behind the Italian frontier, a delighted audience of Hussars watched the bombardment, from the desert south of the town.

This activity seems to have convinced the enemy that the British were in considerable strength. The British also seemed to have plenty of tanks, for the Italians did not know that the groups of tanks sighted by air reconnaissance in back areas, were broken-down cars covered with wooden tank bodies, and that the tracks in the sand around them were made by the few real tanks. On aerodromes and landing grounds also the British appeared to have considerable numbers of aircraft. These were made of wood and canvas, from the Army's furniture, and were moved about by R.A.F. ground-staffs, who had a good deal of spare time for this work as real aircraft were so few. The Italians stayed on their own side of the frontier, and moved up more troops, until by July four divisions lay in the coastal area. Yet the British still maintained their lively bickering and were still masters in the open desert. Whenever the Italians patrolled they moved in force, and not very far.

In the early days of the campaign one immensely important contrast became apparent between the opposing forces. The British had a large nucleus of men with four years' experience

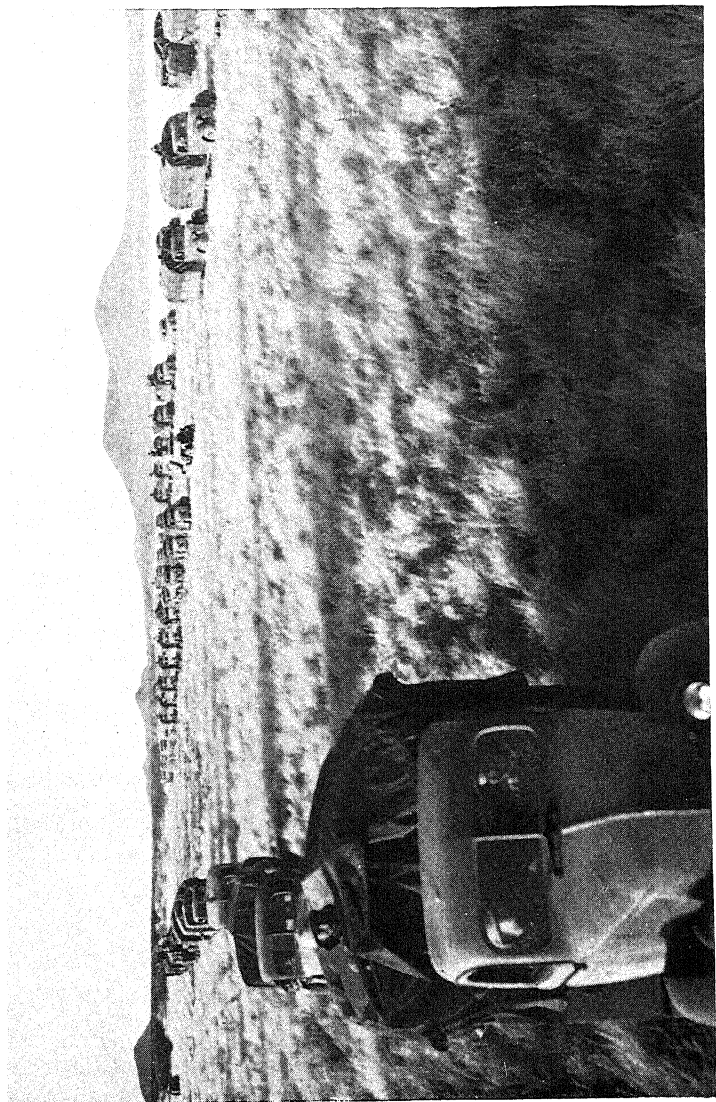
of the desert, men who could train others to live and fight in these difficult surroundings, and Wavell's aim was to make the whole force completely "desert-worthy." The British were growing accustomed to manage with little water and to sleep in their thin drill clothing on the hard ground in bad weather; they were learning to see in the desert, where light was deceptive and often there was nothing definite on which to focus the eyes, and to interpret distant signs. Their bodies were hardened by heat, cold, drought, rain, and tough living. They were trained to find their way, by the use of compass, stars, and speedometers, to featureless points, map co-ordinates in the desert. The British adapted themselves to the desert and did not try to make it a home from home, as the Italians did, or use thought and every scientific means to beat nature, as the Germans did later. Italian peasants and labourers were physically tough and had good nerves, but they were not at ease in this grim wilderness, while the urbanized Italians were depressed by such surroundings, even without the alarms and excursions. Their commanders do not seem to have grasped the fact that the soldier had to become part of this environment, making it help instead of retarding his actions.

Throughout the summer the British harassed their opponents, but Wavell knew that there was a limit to bluff, and that the Italians might advance in strength at any time. His mechanized forces were therefore withdrawn for overhaul, and forward troops were gradually drawn back. Some infantry, medium guns, and mechanized cavalry were kept on the frontier, and the liveliness there was sustained. At the same time the Italians were closely studied by land and air reconnaissance, and at the beginning of September it was judged that they were about to move forward. More of the advanced troops were then withdrawn, wells and *birs* were salted, and mines were laid. At one airfield the R.A.F. concealed a bomb, positioned correctly, and set for the

estimated time of arrival of the first batch of post-prandial visitants.

Marshal Balbo had been killed, shot down accidentally by Italian anti-aircraft guns at Tobruk, and the enemy were now commanded by Marshal Graziani, who had made a reputation, at least for harshness and vigour, in Libya and Abyssinia. His former adversaries had lacked modern weapons and were practically defenceless, so that Graziani's 'form' against a European foe was uncertain. On September 13 he sent forward along the coast two divisions of lorry-borne infantry, another two in support, a mobile group, two hundred light and medium tanks, and a strong artillery. Against them were two battalions of British infantry, a company of Free French, and a few guns. Yet from the moment they crossed the frontier and came down the escarpment by Sollum and onward into Egypt they were punished by this thin screen, by exploding mines and air attack. At night they made laagers of their lorries and tanks, with field-guns at the ready and a searchlight sweeping the desert. This watchfulness did not prevent the British dragging guns to point-blank range, firing into the laagers and starting fires among petrol and ammunition. By September 16 the Italians, somewhat shaken, had covered about sixty miles, reaching Sidi Barrani. In this advance they had suffered two thousand casualties, a number larger than the total strength of the British rear-guard, and had lost many tanks and guns and lorries; while the British screen was lighter by only fifty men and a dozen vehicles.

The advance was accompanied by an optimistic propaganda. "The British have no hope of victory. Egypt will be their prison. We are smashing towards our objective. British resistance has been shattered." It is true that Italians are so accustomed to exaggeration that they discount one-half of anything they are told as fact, in peace or war; but more than the customary belief may have been given to



SOUTH AFRICAN TROOP-CARRIERS ENTER ABYSSINIA

Photo South African Press Service



WAVELL AT MERJ AYOUN, SYRIA

[See page 188.]

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Graziani's milder claims, that the advance had exceeded all expectations and that British casualties numbered two thousand, for the Marshal had the gain of territory to show.

Yet Graziani halted at Sidi Barrani. His reasons are still unknown. Perhaps he was still ignorant of Wavell's weakness; or he may have been awaiting the development of the attack which Italy was about to make on Greece; or he may have decided that he needed more men and supplies and a road from the Libyan frontier. At any rate, he began to set up fortified camps and to make a road. A month later he was still at Sidi Barrani, which was now surrounded by a double line of field-works, mostly machine-gun posts and anti-tank traps. The place was also covered by his camps, each a mile or two in circumference, defended by barbed wire, stone walls, mine-fields, tank obstacles, sangars, trenches, field-guns, anti-tank guns, and anti-aircraft guns. These defence points were sited to meet attack from the east, north, and south, though no Italian expected to have to man them against more than occasional raiders. They were regarded merely as halting-places on the march into the Nile Valley. The garrisons, or at least a good many members of the Italian forces, lived in luxury, with good wines, brandy, tinned and bottled fruits, hams, tongues, and jellies to supplement their rations. The Italian officers had beds with sheets, their dressing-tables held scents and pomades, and their full-dress uniforms were ready in glittering splendour for the Roman triumph by the Nile.

The British were based on Mersa Matruh, which was fortified with trenches, wire, and mine-fields, but the place was used not as a rest-camp but as a centre of operations in the seventy-mile-wide No Man's Land. While the Italians basked in what was by British desert standards a Persian luxury, or stimulated an appetite by fatigues on the new road, mobile British forces were out in the desert to the south, and

patrols operated towards the enemy camps. Wavell's restless, weather-hardened, incalculable "desert rats" watched from their fox-holes, or descended suddenly upon their enemy in the night, causing clamour, alarm, deaths, and destruction. An interest and excitement was provided for the road-makers by visits from the R.A.F.

IV

A possible Italian invasion of Egypt was not Wavell's sole problem, for in July the Duke of Aosta's forces had entered the Sudan, against which it was in the Italians' power to concentrate about one hundred thousand of their great East African armies. If the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan fell, the supply routes by the Red Sea and from the Gold Coast across Africa to Khartum would be lost. The Middle East front would collapse between the forces in Libya and East Africa, and, to quote the phrase of the official history, *The Abyssinian Campaigns*, "the wasp-waist of the British Empire would be severed." It was not difficult for the Italians to occupy the frontier posts of Kassala and Gallabat, for against the first they employed over eight thousand men, with adequate artillery, tanks, and aircraft, against two motor machine-gun companies of Sudanese and a company of mounted infantry though the defenders inflicted five hundred casualties and knocked out a third of the Italian tanks, for the loss of nineteen men, only one being killed! At Gallabat the enemy sent two thousand men with guns and aircraft against a single platoon. Yet despite these successes the Italians felt uneasy. The Sudan forces were active, bluffing and harassing the enemy along the frontier and along the Italian communications with Eritrea. At Kassala the Italians built strong defences and maintained a large garrison, while Sudanese motor machine-gun companies kept them under

observation—usually at only a mile's range—and Sudanese and British struck at an Italian post north of Kassala. As in Cyrenaica, the plan was to keep the Italians doubtful and unhappy by a show of aggressiveness.

At the beginning of August the Italians sent five brigades against the one mixed brigade in British Somaliland. Rhodesians, King's African Rifles, Black Watch, Punjabis, Somaliland Camel Corps, and East African light artillery fought desperately, and at one place the Black Watch swept the Italians and their *askari* in full flight before them. But the single brigade could not hold the territory against odds of at least ten to one, for the Italian force numbered some twenty-five thousand men. All stores and equipment were destroyed, and the troops were taken off from Berbera. Since the fall of France, and the failure to co-operate of strong French forces based on Djibouti, British Somaliland had been no threat to Italian East Africa, but the occupation was celebrated as a great victory. The Italians, however, were to hold this grim, desolate area of the British Empire for but a few months. Meanwhile Wavell may have observed, in the use by the enemy of such uneconomic forces, a certain lack of self-confidence and planning. By October, however, it seemed possible that Italian strategy was to strike at various points, in Africa and the Mediterranean, in order to keep British forces dispersed, and beat each force by overwhelming numbers and material, for in that month Italy attacked Greece, to whom Britain, with France, had given a pledge of support.

To the wonder and delight of the free world, the Greeks with their small army responded with such skill and fury that the invaders were driven back towards Albania. A large part of Wavell's few aircraft, two fighter and two bomber squadrons, went to help the Greeks, and at the Greek request a small garrison was dispatched to Crete. As yet, as the autumn of 1940 turned to winter, no Italian operations

could show much profit, and at the vital point in the Western Desert Wavell had gained months from a shrewd boldness, the intelligent courage of his men, Graziani's caution, and Italy's involvement with Greece. The time gained had been used to train troops and to organize, while the convoys bringing help thrust their way to the Middle East. Many difficulties had been surmounted. Some of the Dominion troops had needed more training; the 4th Indian Division had arrived short of equipment and transport and untrained to operate as a division, but in this case its preparation for the desert arena was smoother in that every man was a highly trained professional soldier, and many had fought on the North-West Frontier. Each brigade of the Indian Division had one British battalion. In Egypt and Cyrenaica, as in all other theatres where they were employed, these Indians were to win unrivalled fame; and, as Wavell wrote, "Off the field, their discipline and soldierly bearing, their good-humoured kindness, everywhere aroused admiration." Australians towards the end of 1940 were completing their training in Palestine and the Delta, and no one was better fitted to direct that training than Wavell, who had passed so many years of his career in making troops ready for war. The New Zealanders were not yet complete, but Wavell had a tempered blade in the United Kingdom troops of the 7th Armoured Division.

The 5th Indian Division which had gone to the Sudan, was employed in November at Gallabat in a brisk action which may have suggested to Graziani that Wavell intended to take the offensive in the south and stand on defence in the Western Desert. On the other hand, a visit, fully publicized, which Wavell made to Crete on November 15 may have implanted the idea in Graziani's mind that it was planned to send British troops to Greece, in which case again, Wavell might be forced to take a defensive role in Egypt. Yet Graziani may have thought that if Wavell was contemplating

action elsewhere he must feel strong enough to hold Egypt. It seems clear, at any rate, that Graziani could not make his mind up as to Wavell's plans.

On the Western Desert front, by November, Wavell's equipment was in some respects superior to his adversary's. The magnificent 25-pounders were better than anything Italian; his armoured vehicles and light tanks were better than the Italian, and though his medium tanks were inferior, he had some heavy tanks, a fact unknown to Graziani. For fighters he had to rely upon the Gladiators, but two squadrons of Hurricanes were soon to arrive. Yet in the mass of mechanized force Wavell was outnumbered by four to one, and there was an even greater inferiority in the numbers of his men and guns. On the face of it Graziani should have been able to force his way to the Nile by sheer weight if he could once set his force into action. December came. How much longer would he halt at Sidi Barrani? For weeks Italian propaganda had promised attack.

Wavell decided to forestall an Italian offensive—to attack while Graziani was still hesitating, and to strike without the slightest warning. A division at the front needed one thousand tons of supplies daily, and only two divisions could be supplied. Even two years later, with greater resources in railway, lorries, transport, aircraft, barges, and pipe-line, only three divisions could be supplied in Cyrenaica. Wavell could use only the armoured division and one infantry division, and if the light-weight was to put the heavy-weight down and out, the element of surprise was vital. To counter-balance the enemy's advantage in numbers and weight of equipment, Wavell based his hopes on the superior quality of his troops, but they would have to be given the initial benefit of surprise. Although Cairo seethed with polyglot 'loose talkers,' the secret of Wavell's intentions was concealed in a masterly fashion.

Italian propaganda was of great assistance, for in mid-

October the resumption of Graziani's advance was repeatedly promised.

Graziani will continue his advance, first to Alexandria and then to the Suez Canal. We shall free Egypt from British troops. Once started, these operations will bring the campaign to a definite, victorious conclusion. The day for the advance is approaching.

It suited Wavell to encourage this propaganda, and all comment from British sources in Egypt was devoted to the forthcoming Italian offensive. Again, despite the crippling of the Italian battle-fleet at Taranto in November, and the passing of a convoy to Malta and Alexandria, no one considered a British offensive possible, and well-wishers only hoped that Wavell would be able to hold out in defence. Other factors helped to form Wavell's smoke-screen. For instance, surprise was considered unattainable in the open desert; in addition, the movement and transport of supplies for the small forces which Wavell intended to use were unlikely to attract attention. Finally, the risk of Press indiscretions, though not great, was obviated by an inconspicuous, routine order that correspondents in Egypt should not remain at night west of Fuka. This could be taken to mean that further in the desert they might be overrun in a swift Italian advance. There were at that time only half a dozen war-correspondents in Egypt, but they were men chosen mainly for powers of intelligent observation. By having to make the journeys to the desert front areas out and back in one day, their opportunities for exercising powers of observation and anticipation were limited.

From Wavell's own words, or from his manner, nothing could ever be deduced. That 'poker' face, tanned dark by the sun, defied all seekers after knowledge. Alan Moorehead gives a picture of Wavell on an air journey to Crete:

For an hour he fished papers from a pigskin case and made notes upon the margins, reducing these notes to paragraphs and those paragraphs to one-line headings. Then for half an hour he browsed quietly through a volume of Browning's love poems, and slept a little and read his verse again. Finally he chatted with me a little and when Crete came in sight he was back on his notes . . . It was his invariable practice to invite his companion to talk, while he asked the questions.

Richard Dimbleby wrote that Wavell's one eye gave him rather a stony expression which could be disconcerting, and that he spoke little. It would be an easy mistake, he thought, for an opponent to underrate Wavell, but a very foolish mistake, for behind the stare and the abrupt speech there was a cold and meticulous brain. "I have talked to Wavell often," wrote Moorehead, "and seldom came away with any really vital information." The Commander-in-Chief had only one confidant—General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, who lived in the same house in Cairo.

A modern general has a long list of problems to consider, apart from directly operational matters. Wavell's included matters of supply, billeting, commissariat, transport, and welfare, for a force which contained many nationalities demanding different rationing and different psychological handling. Among the fighting men, lorry-drivers, and labourers, for whom Wavell had to be general provider and godfather, were British, Dominion, Indian, Polish, French, Maltese, Egyptian, Sudanese, Cypriot, Palestinians, and various types of Arab. In all decisions relating to this army his was the final word and the responsibility. There was a good deal of desk work, even for a general who did not believe in doing his subordinates' work for them, but Wavell got his daily exercise in swimming or riding. His son was serving with the Black Watch, but the rest of his family was in Cairo. One daughter was a nurse and two others were secretaries. On Sundays Wavell entertained large parties of

officers, officials, and visitors to Egypt. He did not hide himself, but neither spies nor friendly news-gatherers could ever make any useful deductions from his words, manner, or movements. A few days before his desert forces struck at Graziani he was known to be on a shooting-trip with King Farouk, and on the evening before the offensive he was in Cairo, imperturbable as ever, as though any smashing blow in "the rough and dirty game of war" was the last of his interests. Only a few officers, the essential key-men, knew that weeks of planning and staff work had reached the point of action. On the morning of the attack the war-correspondents were summoned to his office at G.H.Q. and found him in shirt-sleeves before a wall covered with maps. As he gave the news which thrilled them his manner was as quiet and restrained as ever. The British, he said, had attacked that morning, and already the first Italian camp had fallen. It was a big raid, he said, not an offensive. The correspondents tried to discover what developments the raid might have, if successful, as they suspected it might become an offensive. Wavell would not make forecasts in what he once called "the blindfold game of war," but would only reply that much depended on the quantity of supplies and provisions that might be found, and especially the amount of petrol captured. Then he added, "I should like you to tell me honestly whether any of you knew anything about this attack beforehand."

These picked men from the great newspapers and agencies, each with his own sources of information and sixth sense for news, had learned nothing. Even the assault troops in the desert, during the preliminary moves, thought that they were engaged in routine training. At the last moment, when it could tell the enemy nothing, Wavell issued a straight, soldierly message to the troops:

In everything but numbers we are superior to the enemy. We are more highly trained; we shoot straighter; we have better

weapons and equipment. Above all we have stouter hearts and greater traditions, and we are fighting in a worthier cause.

V

In the first weeks of December 1940 there were three Italian divisions in the camps at Sidi Barrani. Near the coast General Gallina had one Italian and one Libyan division. Farther towards the desert lay an armoured division under General Maletti, and in the rear were two more divisions under Bergonzoli and Berti. The Catanzaro Division, commanded by General Amico, was marching up to the front when Wavell struck. Wavell's field commander was General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, a great contrast in appearance to the Commander-in-Chief. In any clothes, the trim, sturdy Wavell could be recognized as a soldier. Wilson, a large, heavy man, suitably nicknamed "Jumbo," might have been taken in civilian clothes for a banker, or the more human type of professor. He had, in fact, been a chief instructor at the Staff College.

The two divisions employed in the attack, the 7th Armoured commanded by O'More Creagh, and the 4th Indian, under Beresford Peirse, formed a Corps commanded by O'Connor, the best tank general in the Army, whom Wavell described as "a determined little terrier of a soldier, quick and tough." Wavell had noted in his lectures on generalship the importance of a commander's choice of subordinates and his allotment of duties to them, according to their special abilities and character. In these three commanders he had chosen well. As for the men, those of the Armoured Division and its mechanized support group had jockeyed the Italians from the earliest days on the frontier, knew every inch of the terrain, and were undoubtedly the most "desert-worthy" troops who ever fought in North Africa. Wavell's armoured and mobile forces contained

names which would have made the enemy spring to attention had he known the military history of Europe—the Coldstream Guards, 11th Hussars, and the K.R.R.C. It was desert prowlers such as these who brought in the information on which Wavell's plan was based. In their own branch of fighting, the Indian infantry division was to establish a fame equal to the 7th Armoured.

In the air by December Wavell had ten squadrons for all purposes, bombing, fighting, and reconnaissance. Between the camps at Nibeiwa and Bir Rabia there had been discovered an undefended area, and Staff reconnaissances showed that it remained unfortified. British patrols were instructed to keep the gap just lively enough to prevent the Italians covering it, while not arousing suspicion that the British had designs on the neighbourhood. It was then planned to strike through this gap, storm the fortified camps from the west, and exploit success by thrusting on to Buq Buq (a point on the coast) and Sollum. Infantry were to hold the enemy in action on the coast at Maktila; and further to draw the enemy's attention to this area a large dummy tank-park, faked gun positions, and a decoy aerodrome were constructed there. At the inland end of the Italian positions a small armoured force was to contain Sofafi. Tanks and infantry were to carry out the assault on Nibeiwa, the Tummar Camps, and Sidi Barrani, while armoured forces were to go through the gap towards Aziziya, engage enemy tanks, and cut the Italian line of retreat from Sidi Barrani. Land, sea, and air blows were co-ordinated, for the Navy was to shell Maktila and Sidi Barrani, and the R.A.F. was to attack aerodromes, which had already been visited frequently, keep the Italians grounded, and blind them to the crucial British movements. The real British tank depot was in the desert south of Mersa Matruh, and before the attack dumps of petrol were concealed in forward locations. Water supplies also were established far out in No Man's Land.

On December 7 the R.A.F. severely damaged Castel Benito in Libya, the main Italian air depot.

That night the infantry was moved across the wide No Man's Land towards the Italian camps, and the 7th Armoured Division closed in from the desert to within striking distance. On the Sunday the British lay in the wilderness with guns and vehicles camouflaged, and the troops under whatever cover of camel thorn and scrub they could find, while the bombing of Italian airfields, and fighter patrols, discouraged enemy reconnaissance and bombing. Only one enemy aircraft appeared over the troops and apparently saw nothing. At dawn on the ninth the attack opened, as waves of British bombers again attacked the enemy aerodromes.

In the darkness the British and Indians had moved round Nibeiwa. Indians opened fire from the east, and gunfire burst upon the camp from the south-east. Then came the terrifying grind and clatter of tanks crashing into the defences, and the rush of the main infantry attack. The main assault came from the north-west, where it was least expected, in the rear of the tank-traps, mines, and guns. The British blow landed solidly. Artillerymen swung some guns to bear, and Maletti himself worked a machine-gun until he was killed; but in thirty minutes it was over. Overwhelmed by surprise and dash, Nibeiwa was taken, with two thousand prisoners, many guns and vehicles, and a great quantity of stores.

This British armoured force then split into two bodies. One, with British and Indian infantry, swept over the two Tummar Camps, the heavy tanks dealing with the stronger points of resistance. The other pushed on towards Buq Buq. Strong patrols went ahead and in darkness took position round Sidi Barrani. Meanwhile the Indians entered Maktila, and inland the Italians, leaving Sofafi to avoid becoming isolated, were being harassed by British armour. Bombers and fighters were busy against troops and transport between

the front and Sollum. As the British forces were approaching, the Navy again shelled Sidi Barrani.

The defences here were strong, but the attackers did not wait for more artillery. The guns on the spot went into action at once at close range, while armour and infantry advanced. A column of tanks and infantry pierced the outer defences. A Blackshirt division fought well, and for a time during the afternoon the artillery held up the Argylls, Queens, and Leicesters. But after two or three hours of brisk action the defences were rushed by the heavy tanks and infantry, the Argylls leading. By late afternoon Sidi Barrani was occupied and General Gallina was a prisoner. Fleet Air Arm spotters appeared over Italians who were retiring along the coast, and brought the fire of the monitor *Terror* and gunboats upon them. The Italians retreating from Sofafi, hammered by British armour on the flanks and by the R.A.F. overhead, were accounted for fully. Meanwhile the British armoured force which had made for Buq Buq had reached the sea, thus thrusting a steel arm across the Italian rear, isolating the forward troops from their reserves at Sollum sixty miles away, and preventing the escape of the survivors of the British attack. It was a repetition of the cavalry manoeuvre at Megiddo, and a miniature of the German methods in Poznan in 1939, and in France in 1940. Moreover, this arm of steel arrived in the coastal area just as the Catanzaro Division was marching up to the Italian positions in ignorance of the swift-moving events farther east. At that time there was little that infantry could do against armour, especially in this open country. Attacked on the line of march, the Italian column was overwhelmed, and prisoners from this one formation numbered fourteen thousand.

The whole front position opposed to Wavell had now collapsed. The disorganized enemy could not get away and was rounded up in hundreds, so that by December 12 the

attack had taken twenty thousand prisoners and a great store of equipment and guns. Wavell now made the big decision to press on into Cyrenaica and try to smash the Italians there. Where the escarpment approached the sea by Sollum and Halfaya Pass, providing a good defensive position, Bergonzoli and Berti managed to organize resistance, and were supported by bombers which had escaped the R.A.F.'s attentions. But Wavell rode his small, high-spirited horse as though it were not worth half a crown, and by the fifteenth the Italians were going towards Bardia. At Sollum and Capuzzo the British made another haul of war material.

Sollum was useful for landing water and petrol and for embarking prisoners for Alexandria. This was work for the Navy, whose little ships were busy along the coast under the guns of the *Terror* and her little family of gunboats. During the campaign the heavy shells of the monitor had such a shattering effect on Italian troops, and caused such havoc to defences and supply dumps, that many attempts were made to sink her by bombers, E-boats, and submarines. Yet the *Terror's* great missiles still hurtled over the desolate coast as she chaperoned Wavell's divisions into Cyrenaica.

In one week the invaders were driven from Egypt, with the loss of forty thousand prisoners, including several generals, and considerable numbers of killed and wounded. British casualties, mostly in wounded, were less than one thousand. "Your attack," said one of the captured generals, "was brilliantly planned and even more brilliantly carried out." It has been said that, after Sidi Barrani, Graziani intended to make his main stand at Tobruk, in order to lengthen Wavell's supply lines and gain time to organize the strong defences there, but that this course of action was forbidden, as the retreat would have seemed too long, and Mussolini might have 'lost face.' Whatever the reasons, Graziani under pressure, perhaps from his own Government, and certainly from the British, "abandoned his own plans,

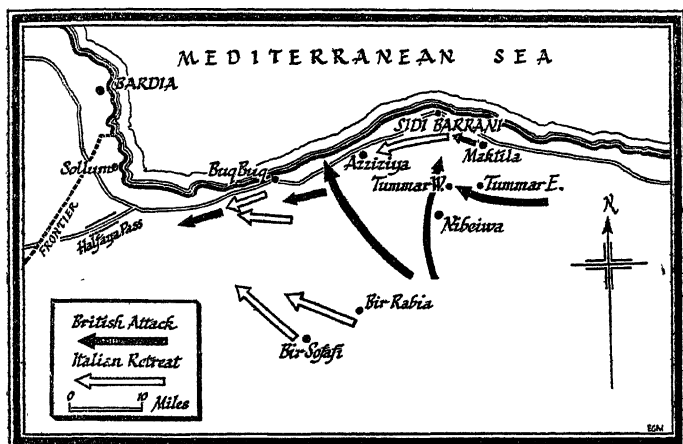
took up position and passively waited attack." This course of action (described in Wavell's words regarding Benedek before the battle of Sadowa) led to the two heavy defeats which the Italians suffered in the next few weeks.

Graziani made his first stand at Bardia, a small township with a harbourage and landing-ground. Strongly fortified with minefields, barbed wire, tank obstacles, strong-points, gun-positions, and concrete shelters, it had a garrison of forty thousand, with a strong artillery. Wavell's forces were still much smaller than the Italian, and he could not risk the losses which might be incurred by a premature assault on this position, yet there was no time for the detailed preparations which had forerun the Sidi Barrani attack. Even in the short advance to Bardia the supply problem was difficult, for, in addition to the British forces, the prisoners had to be supplied with food and water and moved to the back areas. But for the captured food, petrol, and Italian lorries, the offensive could not have continued. Anything that could carry supplies was now impounded, loaded up and rushed forward. At the same time Wavell was withdrawing the 4th Indian Division, taking advantage of the arrival of ships at Suez to transport part of it by sea to the Sudan for operations in Eritrea, for which it was suited by its experience of hill-fighting. As Bardia was being invested and the road westward occupied, Australians were being transported to the front from Gaza, in captured Italian vehicles. The guns rolled up to Bardia and the 'softening-up' process began.

The defences, covering a perimeter of thirty miles, were bombarded from the land, were shelled from the sea by the *Terror's* 15-inch guns and smaller armament and by the 6-inch guns of gunboats, and were regularly raided by the R.A.F. On one occasion, just before dawn, the *Aphis* gunboat slid into the harbourage and fired one hundred rounds into dumps and shore-positions, with a nerve-shattering

thunder of echoes from the cliffs that shook the air for miles along the coast and over the desert.

As the Australians arrived, in storms of dust, varied by heavy rain, the town was more strongly encircled. More and heavier guns were brought up to join the naval and air bombardment, and the shelling was stepped up. The Italian artillery replied smartly, sometimes through a big gun known



SIDI BARRANI

to the British as "Bardia Bill." The commander of the town, Bergonzoli, also had his nickname among his own men.

"Electric Whiskers" was admired by Italians as an active, courageous officer, with experience in the First World War and more recent Fascist employment in Spain and Abyssinia. In one of those nobly phrased pronouncements which Italian commanders seemed to regard as a routine duty on almost any occasion he now promised Mussolini to defend Bardia to the last, as a bastion of Fascism.

The heroics may have sounded thin, at least to the southern

Italians in Bardia's garrison, who knew that after the shelling and bombing they had to expect the Australians! They had not liked the Indians, but they could measure them as highly trained, disciplined, professional troops. The English, they knew, were not vindictive, and gave captured private soldiers better treatment than did other armies their officer-prisoners. Australians, however, were incalculable, for they had the reputation of ferocious shock-troops, lithe, hardy, and active with bayonets. Would they be of the easy English character, or of a sharper temper? This nervousness regarding the Australians may have caused some weakening in Italian morale, in an unwillingness to drive such opponents too far by prolonged resistance, for better soldiers than any Italians have felt reluctance to fight Australians.

Wavell saw the front from the ground and the air. From an aircraft over the smoke and flames of Bardia could be seen the ships unloading at Sollum, the dust of the besiegers in the desert and along the road to Tobruk, the gun-flashes against the dun ground, and the stabbing flame and smoke from the *Terror* off the coast. The Italian-built road into Egypt was dotted with British traffic. Three battleships added their salvos to the bombardment in the first two days of January, and wave after wave of bombers placed their thudding loads on the defences.

Just before dawn on January 3, in moonlight, the Australians cut the wire in the outer perimeter and blew in the anti-tank ditches. The plan was now to pierce this outer line, push tanks and infantry through, and spread out among and behind the strong points. It was as though a bayonet were to be thrust into a body and then twisted about.

The tanks went through, followed by Australian infantry. By the evening of the first day they had advanced two miles and were fanning out, attacking Italian positions from the rear. In one day ten thousand prisoners were taken. Resistance varied, for as the attackers pushed farther through the

defences some of the enemy surrendered in droves while others held out with some stubbornness. Yet with the defence disorganized and lacking flexibility it was soon evident that there was no hope for Bardia. Tanks and guns at close range dealt with the more enterprising Italians, who were for the most part artillerymen and machine-gunners. By the afternoon of the second day fighting had almost ceased, and the mopping up was soon finished. The storming of Bardia brought the total of the prisoners in one month of the advance to eighty thousand. There was a tendency in England to despise the Italians for surrendering in such numbers, but in the subsequent desert campaigns it became evident that, once these fixed positions became disorganized, better troops than the Italians could be forced to surrender in large numbers. The captured weapons now included 800 guns and 1300 machine-guns; and a great store of war materials, hundreds of lorries, two hundred tanks, ammunition of all kinds and tens of thousands of small arms had been subtracted from Graziani's resources. "Electric Whiskers" escaped with his staff, travelled by night and kept under cover by day, and reached Tobruk. Wavell's casualties to this time were fifteen hundred.

The difficulties of supply increased the further the British moved from Mersa Matruh. At first everything from the railhead had been carried by lorries. Sollum had then eased the situation, though its use was limited by bad weather, bombing, and shelling from Bardia. The capture of Bardia provided another forward base for landing supplies and embarking prisoners, but enterprise and dispatch were always needed in all the services of supply, and especially in carrying the water and petrol. In one action the tanks consumed twenty thousand gallons of petrol in a day. A gallon of water per man per day, and half a gallon a day for each vehicle's radiator, was the basic allowance. There was work for every lorry and every driver. Material for mending the

roads, for instance, was carried in Italian lorries driven by Cypriots. Only the wholly essential things could be transported, and the estimate of essentials was drastically modified. The repair of lorries, cars, and tanks in forward mobile workshops had to be developed and accelerated during the battles.

The last resistance ended in Bardia on January 5, and by the next day the thirty-miles outer perimeter of Tobruk was surrounded. Behind this line lay another, nineteen miles long, covering the town and harbour. Even while the last shots were being fired in Bardia, the R.A.F. was photographing the Tobruk defences, and during the period of preparation for the assault the latest minefields, the position of strong-points, and other obstacles were being marked on the maps that were issued just before the attack. The high ground south of Tobruk commands the harbour and overlooks the town. This point was chosen for the assault. Meanwhile the place was pounded from land, air, and sea.

On the night of January 20-21 Tobruk was bombed, and other raiders came over at dawn, as the assault began. Again the attackers pierced the perimeter, more deeply on the first day than at Bardia, for the advance went eight miles into the south and south-east defences. While British and Free French were dealing rapidly with other points of resistance, the Australians by noon of the twenty-second entered Tobruk town, and that evening the enemy ceased fire. At the price of two hundred casualties the position rendered fifteen thousand prisoners, including three generals and the admiral commanding the town, two hundred guns, and large stocks of food and war material. Tobruk harbour, which contained the wreckage of the Italian cruiser *San Giorgio* and several sunken steamships, was the most useful between Alexandria and Benghazi.

After the fall of the town, the most pressing call was for water, as the Italian supply had failed, and the shell-worn,

tank-shocked enemy was suffering acutely from thirst. When it had been supplied the Italians were happy enough to march off in their thousands to be shipped to Egypt. Although many of them regarded the Australians rather as a Saxon monk would regard a Norse pirate, they are a resilient people, and soon forgot their recent dangers. There were always volunteers to carry the equipment of the few guards who led whole battalions, and even the most adventurous realized that without water and knowledge of the desert there was no chance of escape on foot. Bergonzoli had made another successful exit, but that was by air. "Electric Whiskers" was by this time the comic interest in Press accounts of the campaign.

It had been intended to end the advance from Sidi Barrani at Tobruk, but the victory had been so complete that it was decided to exploit it farther. Wavell's little army moved on rapidly, occupied the Gazala airfields, which bore satisfying indications of R.A.F. activity, and the seaplane base at Bomba, where in the previous August torpedo-bombers of the Fleet Air Arm had destroyed four war-vessels with three torpedoes. (They were two submarines, a destroyer, and a depot-ship, and one of the submarines in exploding had set the destroyer on fire.) From the drab, stony desert the British now came into more pleasant country, the Jebel Akhdar, where there was copious water, and trees, flowers, and cultivation. Here the Italians had experimented in colonization, and the flowers and trees of their market-village of Derna were a joy to men who had lived for months in the barren lands.

On the Wadi Derna and in the neighbouring ravines the Italians fought capably, showing determination and skill in the use of natural positions, now that they had few artificial defences. The fighting was, in fact, an indication of the trouble which they might have caused had their commanders chosen to fight a war of manœuvre in the open field. Even

when the Australians were beginning to drive them back finally the Italians counter-attacked and stood up to considerable losses. The Australians worked their way round the enemy, and the Italians at length fell back, destroying the escarpment road into and out of the village. The Engineers soon had the roads in use, but other demolitions were less easily repaired. For instance, it took four days of work, in bitter cold, rain, hail, and mud, to mend a bridge over a ravine at Barce. The excellent Italian road had to be resurfaced, and minefields had to be removed. By the time Wavell's advance reached Derna many of the Italian airfields had been overrun, and the Regia Aeronautica, which fought only intermittently with the R.A.F., was now almost finished in the Cyrenaica campaign. Some of the airfields had been knocked out by bombing before the British reached them—notably El Adem, near Tobruk, which resembled a salvage-dump of bombers and fighters. As the advance continued, sometimes against sharp resistance, as at Derna, the British were too busy to consider the safety of Italian colonists, who were maltreated and plundered by the natives until the British could put a stop to it.

Derna was occupied on January 30. At Cyrene again the enemy put up a fight, but the place was entered on the third of February. The Navy's inshore vessels followed up, with petrol, ammunition, and rations, and returned with prisoners. By this time the Luftwaffe had announced its arrival by adding dive-bombing and mine-laying to the hardships of gales and sandstorms along the coast. Several vessels were lost or badly damaged, and at last the sturdy old companion of Wavell's advance, the *Terror*, succumbed to bombing attacks; but the cargoes for the army arrived steadily whenever human effort could get them ashore.

During the fighting and the pursuits the British commanders had employed the infantry to engage the enemy in direct attack, while the armour struck at his flanks or worked

round to his line of retreat. Now, at the beginning of February, the remains of several Italian divisions had reached Tripolitania, two of them without their artillery, the Australian infantry was advancing along the coastal area, and the armour was centred on Mekili, from which Italian armour had withdrawn. At this moment it was learned that the Italians were about to evacuate Benghazi and retire into Tripolitania with the twenty thousand troops, infantry and armoured, all that remained in Cyrenaica.

The British armour was at once sent across the desert to block the retreat. This move involved a march of 150 miles through a particularly rough district, where the desert consisted of boulders, ruts, pot-holes, and great slabs of rock, and the march had to be made at the armour's best speed. Carrying the minimum of food and water, as almost all the transport was needed for petrol and ammunition, the column set off, hoping to surprise the enemy, who could hardly expect an armoured thrust to develop so quickly from such difficult country. At dawn on February 4, Hussars and Rifle Brigade with two batteries of R.H.A. went off, followed by the main body about noon. No reconnoitring aircraft were flown over the area, lest the enemy's attention should be attracted. By late afternoon the advance-guard was at Msus, and six hours later the main force arrived. At dawn the march continued, a race to head off the retreating enemy, run at times through thick dust that concealed vehicles at a few yards' range, and through showers of cold, biting rain. Through the huddle of rocks rolled the Bren carriers, armoured cars, lorries, ambulances, guns, and tanks, until at mid-day a message came back from the forward units that the Benghazi-Tripoli road was ahead and that the Italians had not yet arrived. The race had been won, and when the Italian column appeared, covering ten miles of road, the British armour was in position near Soluk and Beda Fomm.

When the first shots knocked the leading lorry across the

road the column was held up at once. Part of the British force fastened on to its head, while the rest attacked its rear and flank. Although again taken by surprise, the Italians fought back. The road was soon jammed with wrecked and blazing vehicles, but the enemy were in greater numbers than the British, and it was not impossible for them to move forward off the road, for the country inland was flat. Some of them tried this manœuvre, but were checked by a thin line of the Rifle Brigade. When they massed a tank force to thrust a way to the south the British laid a minefield in front of it. Along the jammed Italian units roared British tanks, Bren carriers, and lorries, raking the enemy, always on the move and always destroying. All next day the British battered them, but the Italians fought back, demonstrating again what they might have done had they been determinedly commanded by better brains than Graziani's. Their commander, General Tallera, was killed, but, gathering another tank column, they made one more effort to break through. The British had expected this and had organized to meet it. The attempt failed, and after thirty-six hours of fighting the enemy could do no more. For ten miles the road presented a spectacle of slaughter and wreckage. The British had destroyed a column of 20,000 men, with 216 guns, 112 tanks, and 1500 lorries, Breda-carriers, and armoured cars.

During the later stages of the fighting a message came through to Headquarters—"Bergonzoli in the bag!" To this H.Q. replied, "Good work. Now get Graziani!" The Italian Commander-in-Chief could not be 'got.' He was far away in Tripoli, and his name was to be heard no more in the long desert campaigns.

While this action was in progress south of Benghazi the Australians were approaching the port from the north. When on February 7 the town was formally surrendered a tough, weary, weather-beaten company of Australians marched in, and for the first time, but by no means the last,

the people who had remained in Benghazi then met the true type of hardened desert warrior. The harbour was mined and blocked, and could be easily bombed by the Luftwaffe from Sicily and Tripolitania, so that it was clear that the Navy would be unable to use it for some time.

In two months on the Cyrenaica front, from Sidi Barrani to Benghazi and Beda Fomm, Wavell had occupied a region as large as England and France, and had taken 133,000 prisoners, including nineteen generals. Masses of weapons, equipment, and supplies included 1300 guns. Some estimates placed Italian losses at two-thirds of the resources which Graziani had built up in Egypt and Cyrenaica. In addition the Italians had lost heavily in killed and wounded, and it was estimated by war-correspondents that the losses in killed and prisoners amounted to half the total Italian numbers in Libya. Whatever the true figures, Wavell had obliterated an army—at the cost of less than three thousand casualties of all kinds. His trust in surprise, mobility, and the quality of his troops and their leaders to triumph against superior numbers and weight of equipment had been justified with a devastating thoroughness. It must have transcended the hopes of the man who had foreseen that, in the new warfare, a David might rise to slay a Goliath.

VI

As these victories were unfolding in the coastal area, a smaller war was being waged in the deserts to the south. Far in the interior, and stretching out towards their empire in East Africa, the Italians held wells and oases, such as Kufra, Jalo, Jarabub, Augila, and Oweinat. With these places for supply and refuelling, it was possible for them to reinforce East Africa with aircraft and to raid Aswan, Wadi Halfa, the Sudan, and the French territory which refused to take orders from the Vichy Government. Wavell had to

know what was occurring in this continent of sand-dunes and waterless, uninhabited desert; and because he had no aircraft to spare for regular reconnaissance and bombing in such a vast region, he had to find other means of gaining information and harassing the enemy.

The instrument was forged by the organization of small, fast motorized units, which could carry water, petrol, arms, and supplies on patrols of two thousand miles, and were trained to travel in unmapped country through immense barriers of dunes. The pioneer of motor-travel in this area was Major R. H. Bagnold, who had discovered the technique of crossing the dune-belts and had acquired unrivalled experience of living in tracts of country that were generally believed impenetrable. Appointed to form the new units, he at first chose his men mainly from the New Zealanders and the Royal Armoured Corps. After special training this Long Range Desert Group began operations in the summer of 1940, when a first patrol was made by two cars and five men. Crossing a range of dunes for a hundred miles they reached the route used by the Italians between Benghazi and Kufra, studied the tracks made by enemy vehicles, were bombed from the air, took prompt evasive action, and returned safely. Wheel-tracks remained in this sandy desert for years, and could mean much to the expert eye. On the other hand, enemy airmen could see the new tracks made by the patrols, and could follow and bomb them. In the great heat of that summer patrols usually travelled at night, and during the day men lying under tarpaulins sometimes became delirious.

Bagnold led larger columns through the terrible heat and heavy sandstorms, split them up beyond the dune-belt, and struck at the bases and routes used by the enemy. Lorries were held up and mails captured, dumps of bombs and petrol and even an aircraft, found on the ground at a refuelling point on the flight to Abyssinia, were destroyed. Patrols made journeys which in normal times would have provided

noted lectures at the Royal Geographical Society. One force crossed a large sector of the continent to reach the Free French post at Tekra in Equatoria. Sometimes they transported a camel by lorry, for use on reconnaissance deep in the deserts. They laid mines along the tracks between the Italian-held oases, and harried the garrisons into evacuating Augila and Oweinat. For a time the enemy halted all traffic between his distant outposts, and subsequently had to reinforce the garrisons, conveying their supplies with guns and aircraft.

Having thoroughly enlivened the area, diverting a little of the Italian strength from the north, the L.R.D.G. sent a force into the Fezzan. Moving with great speed and secrecy, it met a Free French camel unit at Kayugi, in Tibesti. The combined forces travelled northward, over stony desert and surfaces of fine, white sand which was difficult for motor transport. The men were rationed to a pint of water a day, in a temperature of 160° Fahrenheit. An attack was made on Murzuk, nearly eight hundred miles south of Tripoli. All airfield installations and aircraft were destroyed, the fort was set alight and thirty prisoners were taken before the force fell back to Tibesti—destroying stores at the Italian military post at Traghen on the way. The French and British fought another small action against Italians supported by armoured cars, aircraft, and a field-gun. In this affair one of the Group's most experienced leaders, Clayton, was wounded and captured. Four soldiers, two of them wounded, escaped from the enemy and with rations of only one tin of jam and ten pints of water, marched for ten days, following the wheel-tracks of their lorries, before they were spotted by a French aircraft and picked up by a French lorry. The British patrols returned to the deserts nearer Egypt, and the French continued the operations against the Italians in the deeper Sahara. Gradually the outlying garrisons were forced to surrender. Kufra, seven hundred miles south of the

Cyrenaica battlefield, gave up the struggle early in 1941, and the overthrow by Australians of the last of the garrisons at Jarabub soon followed.

VII

Germans are seldom tempted to praise their adversaries, even when the tribute would magnify their own credit. Rommel was lauded, perhaps beyond his due, in the British newspapers, yet at the height of his fame, just before El Alamein, expressed the view to the neutral Press in Berlin that the British were cowards who used dirty and unfair tactics. Russians and Poles are at one end of the German scale of values, the despised, while the British stand at the other, the hated. It was surprising that the Germans wrote with some respect of Wavell, but this generous departure from custom may have been due to the fact that Germans were not directly concerned in the Italian defeat. The neutrals, however, gave Wavell unstinted praise, and rejoiced in his victories as if they were their own, as in a broad sense they were. In England the news from North Africa helped to disperse the memory of Dunkirk and strengthened a nation under the sustained nightly ordeal of bombing.

Asked for an opinion of the basis of Wavell's success, any desert soldier in 1940 would answer without hesitation that it was bluff; that there was really no strength to hold the weight of the Italian army, if it had come straight through in July or even from Sidi Barrani. It is true that the Italians contributed to their own defeat by the failure of their Intelligence to measure Wavell's weakness. In addition Graziani held to fixed defences, instead of making his divisions live and fight in the open desert. Thus he danced to Wavell's tune, surrendering the advantages of greater numbers of men, guns, and equipment which he would have gained in a war of manoeuvre. Even at the last stage, at Benghazi, when

the British were weary and far from their bases, Graziani had enough men and armour to launch a counter-offensive; but the Italians by that time were apparently still ignorant of Wavell's numbers, and were so disorganized that they could devise only a withdrawal. Yet, making allowance for Italian errors, Wavell's success was due in the main to a feat of generalship—in the opinion of competent judges the best piece of pure generalship in the first four years of the war. Certain in his mind of his army's quality, he was able to take advantage at speed of his enemy's mistakes and periods of disorganization, and use to the uttermost the knowledge of desert campaigning which his forces had acquired. These things, imponderable for all but the commander who knew those divisions intimately, were the unfailing supports of generalship by which, with meagre resources, Wavell gained the magnificent Cyrenaican victory.

This first fighting in the desert garnered much experience for future operations. It showed, for instance, the need for special transport for water and petrol and for a larger and smoother organization of mobile workshops, as the desert was harder on mechanical vehicles than were European battlefields. For the same reason it was clear that all equipment for the desert theatre must be of the highest quality. By discovering in practice the equipment that was redundant and that which was essential, the campaign indicated the future direction of supply. It was seen, for example, that tanks would need transporters, so that they could reach the battlefield with the least wear and tear on the way. Tactically the advance revealed, more strikingly to the civilian public than had the fighting in France, the power and immense range of armoured columns. It also underlined the vital importance of rapid, accurate information, for it seemed that the side which held the initiative in the desert had an advantage that was more marked than elsewhere. Desert battles in the future, it seemed evident, would involve few

fixed positions and would demand the greatest mobility. The desert promised an apotheosis of the war of movement and was to be described most justly, by a German general captured later, as "the tactician's paradise." In Wavell's campaign there were no mighty tank clashes on the scale of later operations, but the British commanders' pattern of containing-attacks with infantry, accompanied by encircling moves against the enemy's flanks and rear with armour, was repeatedly employed by all subsequent commanders. Useful experience was also gained with the air weapon. Wavell had employed his limited air support mainly to attack enemy airfields and destroy aircraft on the ground; and the policy had paid. Bombing of troops, convoys, and armour on the coast road or in the open desert was not very effective, unless the enemy was involved in some disorderly panic. The road itself was difficult to hit and the desert allowed wide dispersion of men and vehicles, so that if troops and drivers remained cool and did the sensible things under air attack, many bombs would be wasted. Again, the 'ground-straffer' with machine-guns had no cover in his approach to targets over the open desert and found his best opportunities when the enemy was disorganized in retreat. It was found that static objects, such as dumps, were not easily recognized, for the prevailing yellow and dun of the desert facilitated camouflage. For this reason, together with frequent dust-storms, reconnaissance by air was often difficult, and it was not simple to detect movement by night. On the maintenance side, means had to be found for protecting aero-engines from the all-pervading sand and dust. All these handicaps to the use of the air weapon, and also the impossibility in this terrain of greatly checking an enemy advance by air action alone, were often illustrated again in the later fighting, including Wavell's subsequent encounters with the Germans.

Elated by his great success, opinion in Britain expected

Wavell to pursue the enemy into Tripolitania, but the public lacked knowledge of the hard facts of the situation, and could not be safely enlightened. It was not realized, for instance, that his numbers were so small, that his lorries, tanks and guns needed repair, that it was largely captured material and supplies that had brought him so far, and that he had to consider developments on other Middle Eastern fronts. War-correspondents had taught the people that although the desert was not in itself valuable, it provided airfields to protect naval power over a wider area of the Mediterranean; and it did not need teaching that, if the enemy was finally destroyed in Tripolitania, Wavell's divisions could be directed elsewhere. British patrols pushed on past El Agheila, on the Gulf of Sirte—and then for the public Wavell's advance ended in a question mark.

Actually the situation had begun to change on January 10, when the Luftwaffe appeared in the Mediterranean. On that day a British convoy had been attacked with desperate resolution by German dive-bombers from Sicily. Losing many aircraft, the Germans succeeded in sinking a cruiser and a destroyer and in damaging the aircraft-carrier *Illustrious*. Henceforth the Navy was handicapped in the Central Mediterranean, and more Axis reinforcements and equipment reached North Africa. The Afrika Korps under Rommel appeared in Libya, to take over the main burden of future operations from the Italians.

As Wavell's forces lay in Western Cyrenaica, the British Government had to decide where next to use the forces available in the Middle East. At the beginning of their struggle with Italy the Greek Government had feared to invite British military intervention, partly because it was realized that the British could send little, but also because such intervention might have precipitated German aid to the Italians. The Greek victories had helped the British indirectly, by diverting some Italian supplies and by diminishing

Italian self-confidence; and Wavell's victories had assisted the Greeks by further depressing Italian morale and by the supply to Greece of quantities of captured Italian material, for captured Italian weapons with their ammunition had been sorted and sent to Greece. But during the winter the Germans had been equipping aerodromes in Rumania and Bulgaria, establishing a hold on Hungary, and preparing a broad basis of administration and supply for a war in the Balkans, and, as it appeared later, against Russia. It was evident to the Greeks that they would be attacked whether Britain sent troops or not. Thus, in February 1941, just as Wavell's advance reached Benghazi, a note from Greece reached the British Government raising the question of British help—though not appealing for it. The British Government, after consultation with Wavell and the sea and air commanders, decided to send an expeditionary force to Greece. It was a decision based not only on the sentiment which had been aroused throughout the world by Greek victories, and on the pledged word of Britain, but also on the fact that the British commanders believed that it might be possible to hold the Germans on a short line in the Balkans, with the help of the Greeks and Jugoslavs, and to keep the Germans out of the *Ægean* harbours, despite their thorough preparations for the campaign and their advantages of aerodromes, bases, communications, and numbers—twenty-five divisions were available! The British force numbered 58,000, of whom less than 35,000 were combatant troops.

The departure of these troops, New Zealanders, Australians, and a United Kingdom armoured brigade, under General Sir Henry Maitland Wilson, made Wavell's position in North Africa dangerously weak. Indeed, the Admiralty account of operations in the Eastern Mediterranean holds that the decision to help Greece virtually involved the surrender of Libya, and adds that, "If future historians ever

need an example of how Britain honours her pledges, they have it here."

The troops began to arrive in Greece during March, and the naval effort employed to convoy them led to a weakening of sea and air activity in the Central Mediterranean and along the Cyrenaican coast. More German and Italian troops and equipment crossed to North Africa, and during March units of the Afrika Korps were seen in the desert. Towards the end of the month, the thin British mobile screen had to fall back from El Agheila. The Press in Britain and the countries which wished her well regarded this as merely an incident in the ebb and flow of outpost fighting. Wavell and Rommel, however, recognized it as the beginning of retreat for the British in Cyrenaica, though to Wavell the blow came sooner than he expected. He had only an infantry division and part of a newly arrived armoured division, and Rommel was aware that Wavell could not risk these in battle in the advanced area, for their loss would have almost irretrievably weakened the defence of Egypt.

In the first days of April the British abandoned Benghazi. Rommel now adopted the moves employed by the British in the last stages of their advance. Sending part of his forces along the coast, he dispatched his armoured division at speed across Cyrenaica. To avoid being cut off, the British had to retire rapidly. "From this operation," said Mr Churchill, "three of our generals failed to return." The three were Wavell's best senior officers, and included O'Connor. Yet Wavell not only got his small forces away, but left a garrison in Tobruk, a dagger pressed against Rommel's ribs which affected the whole course of the following desert campaigns. Lack of supplies after a march which had probably gone farther than he expected, the bombing of his land convoys, port bases, and aerodromes, the need for overhauling tanks and vehicles, and the nervousness aroused by the presence of the garrison at Tobruk, slowed Rommel's advance as he

neared the Egyptian frontier. At this point, Wavell had decided, Rommel should come no farther. Well-placed artillery, tanks, and all the aircraft available formed a barrier one hundred miles west of the starting-point of the British offensive, and Rommel was held.

The enemy had reached Tobruk on the heels of the retreating British and Australians. German Staff officers went ahead in cars to take over the harbour—and were made prisoner! When the German forces came up they were hurled back. Weeks of bitter fighting followed, as Rommel made desperate efforts to break in. It is not always realized that the defenders of Tobruk were the first in the war to hold a full-scale, persistent German attack, supported by dive-bombing, heavy tanks, and artillery. A dent was made in the defences, but Rommel was halted, and settled down to a siege which was accompanied by ceaseless air bombardment. To this the garrison could reply only with captured Italian anti-aircraft guns. But at night raiders emerged stealthily from Tobruk, slew their foes or snatched them away into the fortress. Holding firm, Tobruk's defenders awaited the return of their comrades from the Western Desert. Supplying them created other problems for Wavell, but, as always, the Navy rose to the demand, and little ships came into Tobruk past a coast studded with hostile airfields.

The Germans' advance was spectacular, for Cyrenaica was recovered in three weeks, but there was little to show for it in captures of men or British material, as against the destruction of an army in Wavell's offensive. The world was to become inured to the exciting sway of war in the desert (the theatre in which Wavell's prediction of the naval character of mechanized warfare was most clearly fulfilled) and gradually came to learn that damage to the enemy was usually more important than the area of stones and sand occupied. The main loss, in this case, was the Cyrenaican airfields. At the time, however, the retirement was depressing news, and

it is a measure of the impression which Wavell had made, that the nation did not lose confidence in him. After the First World War and the literature which followed it the British nation almost expected futility and lack of vision in its generals, but Wavell's reputation survived the weight of this tradition. The troops in Africa, and those who were meeting the Germans in Greece, had no doubts at all about their Commander-in-Chief. Those in Cyrenaica knew that he had made the right decision promptly and had saved them from Rommel's clutching armour; while the men in Greece realized that in Cyrenaica Wavell had been left 'holding the baby.' The war correspondents saw the clouds gathering round the Eastern Mediterranean, but believed that Wavell was great enough to meet the storm.

Simultaneously with Rommel's advance, the Germans had attacked in the Balkans from Bulgaria and into Yugoslavia. It had taken a *coup-d'état* in Yugoslavia to force a defiance of the Germans, and the effort came too late. The weight behind the well-prepared, strongly based German offensive could not be held. The Greek Government realized that its heroic struggle was ended, and that Wavell should save what he could, to carry on the war. The British Expeditionary Force, weary and disappointed with this end to severe fighting, was rapidly evacuated by the Navy, whose victory off Matapan discouraged attempts at surface interference by the enemy. By night fifty thousand men of Britain, the Dominions, and other countries were embarked and transported safely to Egypt and Crete.

Air reconnaissance now observed vast preparations for an airborne attack on Crete. Hundreds of aircraft, fighters, bombers, troop-carriers, gliders, were seen on the aerodromes of Greece and the Dodecanese. Crete had only two serviceable aerodromes. No more had been built because there were not the anti-aircraft guns or aircraft to defend them. Indeed, there were not enough anti-aircraft guns to

defend the existing aerodromes, for the neglect of armaments for nearly a generation could not be recovered in a few years, and during a war in which much equipment had been lost. The guns which had been produced were defending merchant ships in convoy and British cities. The Cretan aerodromes could be attacked so easily from the enemy bases in Greece and the Dodecanese that it was almost futile to keep aircraft there when battle was joined. It was known that British air support would be meagre at the best, and that probably there would be no effective air support after a few days' fighting, but, supported by the Government and the Chiefs of Staff, Wavell decided to defend the island. There was a chance of saving it, and at least the Germans would be forced to expend a major effort to capture it. The Dominion troops in the garrison could be relied on to maul an enemy whatever the conditions, and the United Kingdom units were from regiments which inspire confidence among their neighbours on any battlefield—the Rangers, the Black Watch, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, the Leicestershire Regiment, the Welch Regiment, the York and Lancaster Regiment, and the Royal Marines. All these could be relied upon to make the Germans pay the price, with or without air cover, adequate artillery and armour, or other supports of the modern fighting man. Only the Germans know the exact price in casualties they paid in the brief, fierce struggle for Crete, but it must certainly be higher than the guarded British estimates, though even these figures are notable. The defenders had one advantage, in that the terrain was suited to defensive fighting. The small garrison had been increased by troops evacuated from Greece, although these were tired men and a large proportion were lines of communication troops, including Cypriots and Palestinians. There were also some Greek units, and the Cretans could be trusted for loyal support. In all, however, there were less than thirty thousand trained fighting men,

with only light arms. Time, shortage of shipping, and shortage of equipment limited the help which Wavell could send from Egypt, but some infantry, tanks, and guns were landed.

While the Navy was occupied in Greek waters, the Axis had been heavily reinforcing North Africa across the Central Mediterranean. Between March and May, in fact, there had been landed in Libya two German armoured divisions, one German light division, one Italian armoured division, and six Italian infantry divisions. On the eve of the German invasion of Crete there was a sharp fight on the Egyptian frontier. For weeks the Germans had been spreading the report that they would soon be across the Western Desert and in the Nile valley, when Wavell struck at them with some armoured brigades, motorized troops and artillery. The German forces were unadulterated with Italians, but their forward areas were overrun before the British withdrew in the face of a strong armoured counter-attack. The Germans claimed a hundred prisoners, but five hundred of the Afrika Korps were brought back to Egypt and the attackers inflicted more losses in men and tanks than they suffered.

The assault on Crete, which began on May 20 after a heavy air bombardment of the aerodromes and anti-aircraft batteries at Maleme and Heraklion, opened with the landing of 8000 parachutists and 750 airborne troops. As the fighting developed, the Navy dealt severely with enemy troop-transports at sea, but suffered such losses that it became clear that the Navy could remain under the short-range air attack from land bases only as long as there was a chance that the land-forces could smash the airborne landings. The troops on Crete, however, fighting with little beyond rifles and Bren guns, were soon practically without air cover, for the nearest British fighter bases, when the Cretan airfields became unusable, were four hundred miles distant. Fighters with

auxiliary petrol tanks were flown from Egypt over Crete, but as most of their flying-time was used in the flights to and from the battle-area, their intervention could be only momentary and indecisive.

Although the R.A.F. bombed aerodromes in Greece and the Dodecanese by night, enough damage could not be done to so many bases as to prevent the continuous attack on the defenders of Crete; and, regardless of losses in men and machines, the Germans poured the big black yellow-nosed carriers into the Maleme area, landing men at a greater rate than they could be killed by the defence and by the numerous crashes. Parachutists came down in flames from burning aircraft, and aircraft cut through clouds of parachutists, mangling them. But still other carriers touched down, and the German foothold was established. In a few days it was clear that the enemy could not be dislodged, but the struggle continued furiously. In nine days' fighting the defenders made twenty bayonet attacks, and never broke under the day and night air bombardment. The parachutists had been dealt with most competently by the garrison of Crete, but once the units landed by troop-carriers had established a hold on the Maleme area and controlled the aerodrome, the battle for Crete was lost. With no opposition from fighters the Germans could land as many troops as could be transported by air, and concentrate close air support for them. At length the withdrawal was ordered; nearly two-thirds of the garrison was taken off by the Navy or got away to the hills and, with the help of Greeks and Cretans, escaped from the island later. A group of 140 officers and men of the Royal Marines, who formed the rear-guard, made an eight-day voyage to reach North Africa, in an abandoned lighter.

Crete was lost, but the defence had not been in vain. At least six thousand Germans were drowned at sea or killed on land, and eleven thousand were wounded. These, for the most part, were highly trained, specialist troops—the pick of

the German army. Of the thousand or eleven hundred aircraft employed, large numbers with their crews were written off, and of the 600 troop-carriers a great proportion was destroyed or damaged. This highly specialized effort employed against Crete might have been applied with far more embarrassment to Wavell in the subsequent operations in Syria, or even in Iraq, and the defence of Crete gave Wavell time for preparation to deal with the crises in those two areas. It is, in fact, recognized now that the series of operations in Greece and Crete, from March to May, though defeats in the field, were of far-reaching strategic value. In addition to their reaction on the situation in Iraq and Syria, they may have disorganized a German scheme to attack the Caucasus through Turkey, and it is known that they delayed the German offensive against Russia.

German propaganda made the most of the fall of Crete, informing the world that the sea was no longer a barrier to invasion, and that their success might well be repeated in the case of another island! Actually the capture of Crete proved little except that the Germans had devoted much effort to preparing airborne assaults, and it certainly did not prove that England could be overcome in the same way. The conditions existing in Crete did not apply in England, in many ways, and mainly in that England had a fighter defence superior to anything the Germans could bring against it. The loss of Crete was due above all else to lack of fighter defence, and the Germans knew well that, with fighters in moderate force over the island and the surrounding sea, not many of their troops would have landed alive. The limitations of such an operation, in the presence of fighter cover, was, in fact, proved by the fact that the Germans did not try to block the later retreat of the Eighth Army along the Egyptian coast road by airborne landings from Crete.

Without the fighters, however, it was still the right decision to make a fight in Crete, for the defence had its place in the

whole strategic pattern. The loss of the island, following the evacuation from Greece, had a saddening effect at home and in the Dominions, yet actually a critical stage of the war had been passed, for by the late spring of 1941 the strategic situation had been fundamentally strengthened by Wavell's victories in Eritrea, Italian Somaliland, and Abyssinia.

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CHAPTER IX

THE OUTER BASTIONS

The Red Sea supply route—Haile Selassie—Action at Gallabat—Reinforcements from Wavell—Keru and Agordat—The siege of Keren—Capture of Asmara and Massawa—American supplies—Towards Debra Markos—Raid on El Wak—Across the Juba—Capture of Mogadishu—Striking northward—Jijiga reached—British Somaliland freed—The Marda Pass—Harrar and Diredawa—The capital occupied—South Africans at Dessie—Amba Alagi—Wavell's strategic direction—Perils in Iraq and Syria—Wavell's Command

IN the Middle East struggle attention is centred on the Western Desert because it was the area from which Egypt was most directly threatened. Yet from the fall of France and Italian participation in the war the safety of the Red Sea supply route became vital. The Red Sea was the long, narrow neck of the bottle into which supplies for the Middle East trickled and later poured. It was in the power of the enemy in East Africa to interfere with this route by sea and air, and to safeguard it was the main object of Wavell's operations in East Africa. The freeing of Abyssinia was a secondary matter, though all operations throughout the Middle East were linked together, and reacted on each other, from Greece to Kenya.

The decision to reinforce the Middle East sent the 5th Indian Division to the Sudan, and Kenya was allotted troops from South and West Africa and mechanical transport from the Cape. More air strength was added to the Kenya and Sudan forces, which were by 1941 raised to some 150 aircraft, Gladiators, Blenheims, and Wellesleys; and arms (mostly old-fashioned but the only type available) were sent into Abyssinia for those patriots who had never tamely settled

down to Italian rule. It was fear of revolt in Abyssinia, as well as the loyalty of the Sudanese and the dash and military efficiency of all the troops on the Sudan frontier, which at least partly induced the fatal Italian hesitancy in the summer of 1940, when, in the words of the British official account of these operations, the Italians by resolute, co-ordinated action could have added Africa, as Germany was adding Europe, to the Axis spoils. The British proceeded at once to fan the spark of Abyssinian revolt. The deposed Emperor, Haile Selassie, was sent by the British Government to Khartum, and his arrival was made known through connexions which the British had established with Abyssinian patriots. The spark began to glow when Colonel Sandford and a few British officers entered the Gojjam, making contact with the patriot chieftain, Mangasha. The colonel must have been physically tough, in view of his fifty-eight years, for his mission had to live hard, make long marches through the roughest country, and sometimes the officers had to run hard for their lives with the Italians on their heels. They advised in the guerrilla warfare which ensued, warning the Abyssinians against their predilection for bold attacks on fortified posts, and showing them that more fruitful and less costly results could be obtained by activities along the roads and tracks. Events elsewhere also encouraged Abyssinians to take up arms.

In the first week of November 1940, in a fierce action at Gallabat on the Sudan frontier, the British forces destroyed an Italian colonial battalion and badly mauled two others, and though they could not hold their ground because of the enemy's air superiority, they proved that they now had the power to strike, further excited Abyssinian hopes, and forced the Italians to think of defence rather than of penetrating farther into the Sudan. Then the 4th Indian Division began to arrive by the Red Sea and the Nile Valley, fresh from the victory of Sidi Barrani, and about the same time



MAIN ADVANCES, ITALIAN EAST AFRICA

Wavell allotted to the Sudan front a company of heavy tanks and a battery of 6-inch howitzers. General Platt, Wavell's field commander, could now consider offensive action towards the Red Sea.

On January 19, 1941, after recapturing Kassala, Platt entered Eritrea. Defeated in a sharp action at Keru, the Italians prepared to fight again at Agordat, where General Lorenzini was ordered by the Italian Commander-in-Chief in Eritrea, Frusci, to make a solid stand. The enemy had twelve thousand infantry, seventy-six guns, and two companies of light and medium tanks. Platt's forces numbered only four thousand, with less than a dozen tanks, including some of the heavy type designed to lead infantry in attack; but he considered that the Italian bombers presented the greatest danger. A sudden attack by Hurricanes on the two main Eritrean aerodromes obviated this peril by knocking out fifty enemy bombers. Near Agordat, at Barentu, a motorized column drove another strong force of Italians into the refuge of a fortified position.

Hard fighting in difficult hill country followed. The British commander used most of his force in a flanking movement against the Italian position; the British and Indian troops fought with a pace and imagination that bewildered the Italian commander, and on the last day of January his troops were in flight. A thousand prisoners and forty-three guns taken, and fourteen tanks destroyed, accompanied the capture of Agordat on February 1. On the next day the 5th Indian Division attacked at Barentu, where the large Italian force had every advantage of ground, among hills, cliffs, and dense scrub, but were driven back, abandoning guns, tanks, and motor transport. In two weeks Platt's forces had accounted for six thousand men, eighty guns, twenty-six tanks, and four hundred lorries. Indeed, Eritrea might have fallen soon after these victories, had not the pursuit been held up briefly by demolitions, so that the reinforcements

which the Italians had been rushing from the south were enabled to take up position in the mountainous region of Keren. Wavell was present at the fighting, and under machine-gun fire at Agordat and Barentu, and was to witness later the greatest battle of this campaign.

Air photographs of the Keren region show a wild immensity of peaks, knife-edge ridges, precipices, gorges, and narrow defiles in which the attackers had to fight. The main approach to Keren was through a gorge into which the Italians had blown two hundred yards of cliff. In this redoubtable position the Italians had strong artillery, mortars, and light grenades which could be rolled down in hundreds to burst among the attackers climbing the steep, rocky slopes or clinging to narrow ledges high in the defences. They had mule transport, suitable to this mountainous terrain. Their observation over the country below was complete, and there was no way to turn their position. Only desperate courage, plodding obstinacy, and great firepower would have any effect on the defenders. The first frontal attacks were checked, though troops held on for weeks to positions which they had reached. It was clear that more preparations and greater reserves of supplies would be needed before the Italian positions could be stormed.

During the period of preparation the Italians reinforced Keren, though some of the reinforcements intended for this stronghold were diverted by operations launched by the British commanders towards the Red Sea, to threaten Massawa, the chief Eritrean port. Some of Platt's forces were withdrawn for further training in mountain fighting and to ease the problem of supplies, and two Cypriot mule companies were brought in to help with transport over country difficult for lorries. More guns were brought into position, and with the R.A.F. began methodically to wear down the defenders. Wavell studied the front at first-hand,

and was present at the final assault. The persistent and increasing punishment Keren was receiving from guns and aircraft resulted in the desertion or surrender of many colonial troops. Against the twenty-three thousand men on Keren, Platt had thirteen thousand, and artillery consisting of 25-pounders, six-inch, and 3.7 howitzers. On March 14 the R.A.F. blew up a train from Asmara carrying thirty thousand shells.

On the next day the big assault began, with a strong artillery bombardment preceding the infantry attack launched in thunderstorms and sultry heat. For the next ten days there followed a fierce struggle among the rocks, cliffs, and peaks. When the infantry was pinned down, air and artillery attack was increased. Bombing is usually more terrifying, though less accurate, than the fire of guns, for infantry can usually note the plan of artillery fire; it is more rational than bombing, and a peril that can be assessed is less demoralizing. The British guns at Keren, however, adopted the tactics, unusual at that time, of firing all guns in a salvo at one fixed point, and then rapidly switching the next burst of firing to another. It was disconcerting and demoralizing, and much more damage was done than by a scattered fire. One of these sudden concentrations deprived the Italians of Lorenzini, a commander famed among them as "The Lion of the Sahara." By March 27 the garrison of Keren had experienced enough of the combined infantry, air, and artillery assault. Frusci decided to retire, leaving three thousand dead in the position. Four thousand men surrendered to the British, and *askari* were fleeing in great numbers.

The storming of Keren will remain high among the honours of the Indian divisions and their United Kingdom battalions. Their casualties numbered more than four thousand, but the victory was decisive. The best troops from the enemy's strategic reserve had been broken, and those in

flight were being bombed and machine-gunned along the road to Asmara. There was another strong position at Teclesan, but the enemy had no heart to defend it. Platt's men entered Asmara, taking five thousand prisoners, one and a half million shells, three million rounds of small-arm ammunition, and the entire supply of clothing and equipment for the Italian army in East Africa. Mobile forces pursuing the enemy down roads into Abyssinia captured at Adigrat battalions dispatched too late to reinforce Keren. After a slight, unwilling resistance the port of Massawa was captured, and with it ten thousand prisoners, seventy-six guns, and some tanks. The ten destroyers based there put to sea, but all were accounted for by sea and air action or by running themselves ashore. The entire Eritrean army was destroyed or dispersed, with forty thousand prisoners and three hundred guns in British hands. Thousands of *askari* went 'back to the land,' where they might be seen working innocently, but easily recognizable, both by their bits of uniform and by their military bearing, for these were well-trained troops. Frusci retired to Amba Alagi, followed by one of Platt's divisions, a few guns, and some aircraft. Wavell had witnessed this attack on Keren—the fiercest action ever fought outside of the Western Desert and Cyrenaica, and one of the decisive battles of the war.

Now the Red Sea was free, and also the air route across Africa to Khartum could not be menaced. Moreover, the United States Government forthwith removed the Red Sea from the list of combat zones, allowing American equipment to be carried direct to the Middle East in American ships. Later in the year Americans and British began the task of developing the Red Sea ports in Eritrea and Egypt, building new docks, bringing in huge cranes, locomotives, rails, road-materials, salvage equipment for Italian ships sunk at Massawa, setting up repair-shops, assembly plants for

aircraft, and building aerodromes. These activities were extended to the Persian Gulf and elsewhere in the Middle East, and were continued after America entered the war, forming the channels for a great stream of supply and maintenance in 1942 and 1943 until the Mediterranean was freed.

The great victory was due not only to the vigorous and skilful operations in that area. During these months the Italians were engaged in other East African theatres, when Abyssinia was invaded from the Sudan and General Cunningham advanced from Kenya.

II

While Haile Selassie was at Khartum and Sandford in the Gojjam, Abyssinians were being trained by the British and formed into regular units. With a Sudanese force they were destined to invade Abyssinia at the head of a train of supplies carried by fifteen thousand camels. Meanwhile the R.A.F. raided over north and west Abyssinia, giving confidence in British power to chieftains who might need reassurance before revolt. In January 1941 the Emperor crossed the frontier, and in the following month the first important blow was struck near Burye by Major Wingate with four hundred and fifty men and four mortars against five thousand of the enemy who had cavalry, guns, and fortified posts. The Italians fell back, abandoning outlying positions after only two days' fighting, and by the beginning of March most of their troops in this area were in the hills by Debra Markos. Here three hundred Sudanese under Colonel Boustead, acting in small groups, conducted a wearing guerilla war against them, mainly by night raids, swift and stealthy, with grenade and bayonet. Thousands of Italian native troops began to desert, and the remainder were withdrawn across the Blue Nile. Great quantities of supplies

were found at Debra Markos, and American lorries were brought from the Sudan, often by sheer muscle-power across the roughest country, with the result that supplies could be moved about more easily where better roads existed. A few hundred Abyssinians and Sudanese had driven back thousands of the enemy, and in subsequent actions their small forces again overcame large bodies of Italians. At Agibar, for instance, a few Sudanese and trained Abyssinians with some two thousand Abyssinian irregulars, cornered a column of eight thousand Italians. Attacking with great spirit by night and day, at the cost of two hundred casualties they took seven thousand infantry, seven hundred Italian officials, one hundred and twenty light machine-guns, two mortars, hundreds of horses, and thousands of mules. The mules were invaluable to the Emperor's troops, whose route was strewn with the carcases of camels, the last fifty worn-out beasts being slaughtered within sight of Addis Ababa! Another smart action was carried out by Sudanese, to round up an enemy battalion in a fort at Motu, between Debra Markos and Lake Tana. Crossing a 14,000-foot range in sleet, snow, and rain, sixty men, with some machine-guns, one mortar, and the exercise of bluff, forced the garrison to surrender after a slight resistance.

These operations through Burye and Debra Markos, and other irregular fighting, had been achieved with small numbers, but, together with the Italian fear of a general Abyssinian rising, had forced the enemy to keep fifty-six battalions in districts where they could not be used against the main advances by Generals Platt and Cunningham. On May 5, 1941, five years after the Italian conquest of his land, the Emperor re-entered his capital. Troops of the British Empire were there to greet him, for they had reached Addis Ababa a month earlier from the south.

III

In the summer and autumn of 1940 there had been a war of patrols and outposts along the hundreds of miles of wilderness on the Kenya border. The forces in this area, in the autumn, came from South, East, and West Africa, and were supported by the South African Air Force. A Rhodesian squadron was withdrawn for the Sudan in September, when the first display of Italian aggressiveness was ending. Cunningham, who arrived in Kenya at the beginning of November, considered that his forces were still too weak for a major action and that none should be attempted until after the rains, which were due in March. He decided to wear the Italians down, in the meantime, by patrols and small actions, and a raid on El Wak was planned for December 15. Moving 110 miles by night through country which the Italians believed impassable for mechanized vehicles, South and West Africans fell upon this outpost with such skill and fury that the place was destroyed, its garrison killed, taken, or dispersed, and sixteen guns captured, at the cost of two killed and a few wounded. The Italians began to withdraw their main forces to the east bank of the Juba river, leaving only outposts to the west.

By the beginning of 1941 the victories in Cyrenaica and Egypt and the advance in Eritrea, together with an increase in transport for his forces, allowed Cunningham to prepare an advance on Kismayu. First, a subsidiary attack was launched by South Africans from the region of Lake Rudolf. They found that the enemy fought without much plan or enthusiasm even in strong positions, and that their sufferings came rather from the unexpected rain, mud, and low temperatures; but they pushed their attack through swamps and over cliffs to capture Mega. Abyssinians and South Africans occupied Moyale, which had been lost to the Italians earlier. With a string of captured posts to their credit,

the South Africans were then withdrawn from this front, but operations by other African troops and Abyssinians continued in the district, with the result that no enemy troops could be moved eastward to support resistance to Cunningham's main offensive.

After some manœuvring and feints west of the Juba the advance began on February 11, across a hot, arid wilderness. Only at one point did the Italians show much fight in a strongly prepared position, but the West Africans dealt with them efficiently, despite the loss of most of their white officers. The South African Force bombed the enemy effectively at Afmadu and Kismayu, and the South Africans entered the latter place without much trouble. The Italians now indicated by heavy artillery fire that they intended to hold the line of the Juba, which was nearly two hundred yards wide and bordered variously with palm, jungle, and cultivated lands. They fought for the crossings, firing on South African troops in canoes who were covered by fire from their own guns and armoured cars on the western bank; but when a moderate-sized force was across the Italians' defence crumbled rapidly. Counter-attacks were launched—one of them came silhouetted against the dawn horizon, and men were mown down in scores, especially by the South African armoured cars—but the Italians seemed to have tried to defend too many possible crossing-points, and kept no adequate reserve to deal with the head of the attacking forces when the river was crossed by South Africans and West Africans. Beyond the Juba, with Jelib bombed and captured on February 22, the Italians were pursued ceaselessly. The South African Air Force had driven its Italian opponents on to the defensive, and there was little protection from the skies for the retreating troops. Mogadishu was entered by armoured forces and Africans on the twenty-fifth, one brigade having covered 275 miles in fifty-nine hours, fighting small actions on the way. Another African division

turned north, defied all difficulties of supply, and cleared Italian Somaliland as far as Dolo, some 250 miles north of Jelib, by March 5. Four days earlier Cunningham had launched a lightning advance from Mogadishu northward.

At this port, a place of fifty thousand people, nearly half of whom were Italians, a bare, treeless town on the edge of the desert, huge quantities of supplies were found, including 350,000 gallons of petrol, and enough food to supply 10,000 men for six months. The place had been used by enemy sea-raiders, and the advance released two hundred men of the British Mercantile Marine who had been made prisoner. When the port was cleared of mines it began to handle several hundred tons of supplies daily, but all the Italian Somali ports could not cope with Cunningham's needs, and he had still to use the long lines of communications with Kenya. Up to this point most of two Italian divisions had been annihilated, thousands had been killed, thousands captured, and many dispersed, probably to die in the wild, desert country. Successful pursuits, Wavell has said, are rare in history, but henceforth the enemy in East Africa was never allowed time to recover and reorganize. In the air the South African Air Force had established supremacy over the Italians, and the rapidity of the subsequent advance is in part due to the enemy's dislike of the constant threat, and the actuality, of air attack.

On March 1 a Nigerian column moved out from Mogadishu, at first over a good tarmac road, the Strada Imperiale, and, when the road ended, by tracks or over trackless country. Sometimes it was necessary to deal with Italian irregulars, the "Banda," when South African armoured cars proved the ideal weapon, and at times the columns paused for supplies to catch up with the advance; but the move northward was made at great speed, with the armoured cars on occasion as much as a hundred miles ahead of the main

force, so that by March 17 the leading troops had covered nearly 750 miles! The Italians made air attacks on the columns, mainly with aircraft based on Direadowa, until the South African Air Force twice attacked that aerodrome, destroying most of the enemy machines. As the Nigerians came northward unchecked, the Italians began to evacuate British Somaliland. A force from Aden chased the rear-guard out of Berbera, and the retreating Italians farther east, cut off by the arrival of the Nigerians at Jijiga, seem to have dispersed. At Jijiga the South African Air Force found useful landing-grounds on the wide, grassy plains. Forces from Jijiga now marched into British Somaliland, and South African troops, landed at Berbera, went inland to occupy Hargeisa. The port of Berbera and the lines of communication into Abyssinia were soon safe and working, greatly easing Cunningham's supply problems.

At Jijiga the advance came out of the flat country into the Abyssinian highlands. The Italians at first showed signs of defending the gate to this region, the Marda Pass, a decision which would have suited Cunningham, who had complete confidence in the ability of his Africans, South African artillery, and armoured cars to destroy the considerable Italian force and was anxious to pin it down. The Pass was defended by minefields, wire, numerous well-sited machine-guns, and an excellent artillery; yet on March 21 the enemy appeared to be preparing to retire, so that Cunningham had to attack at once. After a day's sharp fighting, in which one commanding height was captured, and the Italians were driven from another by a grass-fire caused by shelling, the enemy again fell back, and the pursuit was resumed. Although the road lay through rugged country with ravines that could have been defended almost indefinitely by determined men—for it was often impossible to outflank these positions—the Italians made only a fitful resistance. Sometimes they would stand boldly for a time,

and their artillery would fire accurately at the troops making the frontal attack, but they rarely held for long. When it was possible to threaten their flanks the British commanders made the most of the ground, and the Italians would never hold for long under threat to their flanks. Some troublesome resistance developed near Harrar, but the town fell on March 27. Again, on the road to Diredawa, demolitions and machine-guns, believed to be manned by Italian officers whose men were scattered, caused a slight delay, but on the twenty-ninth South Africans entered the town. Diredawa provided a good aerodrome for the Air Force to help in the pursuit of the enemy towards Addis Ababa, three hundred miles away.

Cunningham's men pressed the retreat hard. Rear-guards usually fled or stood only to surrender. Even tanks surrendered to infantry. The line of the Awash river, with its bridges destroyed, would have provided a stronger defensive position than the Juba, but the enemy retreated again at the assault of the King's African Rifles. A bridge was soon in use, and mobile units harried the fleeing enemy, while aircraft hastened the flight and knocked out the remaining aircraft on the aerodrome at Addis Ababa. On April 5 the Italian Chief of Police came out to surrender the capital, and on the next day representatives of the victors entered, in cars, without fanfares, military parade, show of force, or bombast: a manner which must have surprised a generation of Italians reared on these things. Between January 24 and April 5, Cunningham's drive had covered nearly two thousand miles!

Addis Ababa provided more than ten thousand prisoners and great quantities of supplies, which included large medical stores, enough food to feed the prisoners and the Abyssinian troops for a year, three hundred thousand gallons of Diesel oil, and five hundred thousand gallons of petrol. In the drive to the north twenty-two thousand

prisoners, of whom half were European, had been taken, and thousands of Italy's troops were killed, wounded, or dispersed over Italian Somaliland and Abyssinia; for while there had been no battles on the scale of Keren, there had always been a varying resistance. Cunningham, says the official narrative, had won against the weather (the race against the rains), against the enemy, and in the struggle of supply, which was always more likely to beat him, and describes the campaign as "not so much a war as a well-organized miracle." To the people in Britain, however, the occupation of the Abyssinian capital meant more than the conclusion of a great military feat. The British nation had suffered repeated humiliations during its years of weakness; but at last Britain had been able to restore an Empire seized by an aggressor, and she had done it while fighting at first alone, and then with one small ally who was now, in April, on the point of collapse. With the air bombardment of Britain so bravely borne in those months, it was to the British a part atonement for the years of narrow vision and slackness which had made possible the sufferings of the Abyssinians, and then of Poles, French, and the smaller European nations.

The Italians in Addis Ababa were not depressed, for the Germans were launching their well-prepared attack on Greece and Yugoslavia, and the British were withdrawing in Cyrenaica. Many Italians believed that Rommel would reach the Nile and by the summer appear in the Sudan and Abyssinia. There were still large Italian forces in the field, and the order was given to them to hold out and pin down Wavell's forces as long as possible. The order led to further campaigns in the Lakes region south of the capital and in Gondar, while fighting continued in north-eastern Abyssinia. In bad weather South Africans fought a hard five days' action at the Cambolchia Pass, in wild mountainous country, 240 miles from Addis Ababa along the excellent road to

Massawa. The Italians and their colonial troops, supported by heavy naval guns, here fought well enough to win the admiration of any troops, but the South Africans took eight thousand prisoners and much war material. Dessie was occupied, and, continuing their advance, the South Africans linked up with Platt's northern forces, who were attacking the mountain stronghold of Amba Alagi with a clever, wary persistence against a capable defence. The South Africans joined in the attack, which was continuously pressed, although the attackers were operating at the end of long, difficult lines of supply with Asmara. On May 15 the position was surrendered, the Italians being granted the honours of war. Platt's captures in four months now amounted to fifty thousand men and three hundred and forty guns. Highly trained and disciplined troops, supported by a small force of aircraft, obsolete and modern, all directed with able generalship, had overcome every difficulty of supply and terrain, in the face of the best resistance the Italians ever made in Africa.

When his main campaign was ended Cunningham had accounted for Italian forces numbering one hundred and seventy thousand men, with four hundred guns, and some scores of armoured fighting vehicles. This was not the whole count, for many of the enemy, European and colonial, must have died of thirst, hardships, and wounds when lost in the desert wildernesses, and at the end of the campaign in Gondar twenty-three thousand more surrendered, with fifty guns and four hundred machine-guns. It was a triumph of speed over an enemy who sometimes fought with skill and stubbornness, but was being attacked from several directions at once, so that he could not concentrate on one. The British commanders, from the moment they were able to strike, after Wavell's first successes in Cyrenaica, seized and held the initiative, which helped to balance their lack of numbers and guns. Cunningham's operations were carried

out with never more than fifty thousand men and some seventy guns. Supply limited infantry attacks to two or three brigades.

Wavell had been well served by his field commanders, and by his mixed forces, of all arms, inadequately equipped. Wavell's responsibility lay in the strategic direction of his several theatres of war, and, compared to the large numbers and vast resources which had been assembled by the Italians, his men and material were so scarce that he had to be the chess-player, moving his few pieces to the maximum advantage. No men, guns, tanks, or lorries could be kept on one front longer than was absolutely necessary. The 4th Indian Division, for instance, had gone to the Sudan immediately after Sidi Barrani, and was brought back to Egypt without delay after Keren. South Africans were moved from southern Abyssinia to Egypt, in March 1941. After the fighting near Mega, South Africans were withdrawn to support operations in British Somaliland and for duty on lines of communication. Aircraft were flown from East Africa to Egypt, to meet Rommel's advance. Wavell had to make the most of every man, gun, lorry, tank, and aircraft, and only by a shrewd economy and exact timing and judgment could he sustain operations in so many scattered areas separated by vast distances. These rapid victories eased the situation, by releasing troops, equipment, and transport for other theatres where they were soon to be needed.

It has been generally noted that the Italians and their native forces fought better in Eritrea than elsewhere, and it is possible that in East Africa and Abyssinia they would have caused more trouble by avoiding battle in prepared positions and using their large numbers and great resources in more flexible, irregular warfare. Whatever the Italian mistakes, however, soldiers regard these campaigns, undertaken with slender resources in a most difficult terrain, as a masterly achievement by Wavell and all the commanders and staffs

concerned. In its clear-cut planning and great speed, the conquest of Italian East Africa made the swift Italian victory over Abyssinia appear heavy-footed—and the British commanders were not fighting a practically defenceless foe. In Egypt and Cyrenaica Wavell had gained the least costly great victory in British history, while the triumph in East Africa equalled the finest feats of any nation's colonial wars—if fighting against Italo-African forces with modern equipment could be so described.

IV

While Wavell was striking and parrying in Cyrenaica, East Africa, Greece, and Crete, a further danger had been developing in Iraq, which was vital to Britain by reason of its oil and its position in relation to Egypt, the Persian Gulf, and India. The state owed its existence to Britain, and the Regent for the young King was friendly, but some Iraqis considered that a good bargain might be struck with all-conquering Germany. A *coup d'état* on April 2, 1941, deposed the Regent and placed Rashid Ali at the head of the state. By treaty Britain had the right of reinforcing her garrison in Iraq, and the new Government at first pretended to welcome the arrival of troops from India at Basra. Soon, however, it showed its unfriendly intentions when more reinforcements arrived at Basra on May 1. Iraqi troops occupied the plateau above the R.A.F. training centre and cantonment at Habbaniyeh, and cessation of all flying activities was demanded. Habbaniyeh had about one hundred trainers and some obsolete operational aircraft; the pupils had no experience of war-flying, and the instructors had not been in action for many months. All the personnel, however, regarded their unexpected front-line role as a special favour of Providence. Fitting up aircraft such as the Oxford and Audax to carry bombs, or carrying small bombs to

drop over the side, they knocked out batteries of Iraqi guns, attacked road transport and reinforcements on the march, and instantly developed an aggressiveness that must have convinced Rashid Ali that he had stepped off on the wrong foot. Ammunition for two guns in the cantonment was flown from Basra, troops followed by air, and by bombing and patrols of raiding parties sent out at night, the Iraqis were forced from the plateau and shortly retired on Fallujah. Habbaniyeh had proved a hornet's nest, but while it was defending itself, swift measures were proceeding elsewhere. The troops at Basra drove the enemy from the airfield, the harbour, and the power station. Aircraft from Palestine attacked aerodromes, transport, Iraqi camps, and an Axis air contingent at Mosul. Troops were sent in towards Mosul and Bagdad, and the capital was occupied by a small force which advanced across six hundred miles of desert from Transjordan.

Rashid Ali fled, the Regent was restored, the Axis aircraft took off from Mosul, and by the beginning of June, Wavell's prompt measures had closed this side-door of the Middle East. There remained another entrance, through Syria, which the Axis might try to force. However, the fighting on Crete had not only destroyed or exhausted German specialized units and equipment which might have been employed in Iraq or Syria, but had also given Wavell time for preparation to hold these outer bastions. If the Axis had gained control of Iraq, British oil-supplies would have been lost, the Arab world and the neutrals might have been convinced by such a German success following the withdrawals in Cyrenaica, Greece, and Crete that Britain's fight was indeed hopeless, and the enemy would have gained a strategic position from which Britain, and Russia when it suited Germany, could have been caused almost immeasurable difficulties.

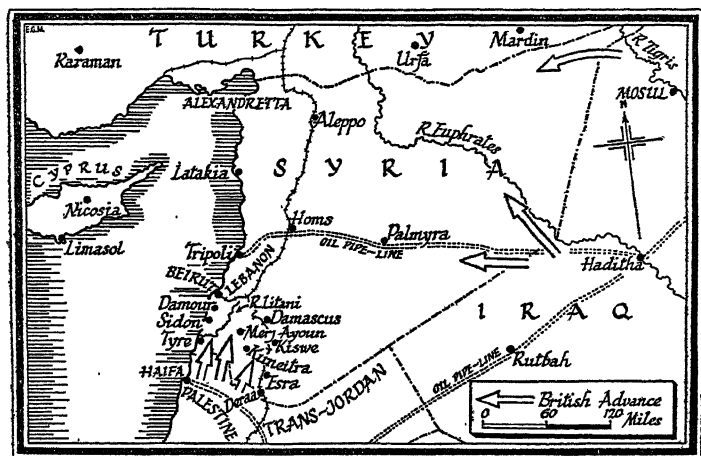
In planning trouble for Britain in Iraq, the Axis had used

aerodromes in Syria, by agreement with the Vichy Government and the local French Command. It was known that their aircraft had landed, carrying military and political agents on their way to Iraq—and to Persia—and it was believed that the Germans were also landing war-equipment in Syria. As German penetration in Syria threatened both Egypt and Turkey, the ally whom Britain was making every effort to rearm, as well as the British operations in Iraq, it became necessary in mid-May to bomb various Syrian air-fields. Then, when the Iraq danger had been removed, Wavell sent forces into Syria, under General Sir Maitland Wilson.

The French High Commissioner, General Dentz, with an army of thirty thousand, mostly professionals, and with considerable local levies, had a superiority of three to two in men and a greater number of guns and tanks than the British commander, for not only were Wavell's resources widely extended, but it was hoped that only small forces would be necessary; that the French might allow the occupation with only a slight resistance, if indeed honour demanded firing on their country's best friends. It has been said that the French showed considerable fight in order to erase from British minds any impression that the French were decadent. There can be little in this suggestion, for most of the stiffest fighting was done by Foreign Legion and African troops. It was the British Command that was influenced by sentiment, and by humanitarian and political considerations, such as the reluctance to fight an old ally, the desire to avoid a worsening of Anglo-Vichy relations, and the determination to spare suffering among the civil population.

On June 8 the advance began tentatively, without the force and speed which Wavell and Wilson knew well how to employ. Free French troops were with one of the columns, perhaps in the hope that an appeal might be made to their fellow-countrymen. Syria was, in fact, a League mandate,

not French territory, and could have been handed over to Britain with all honour. Yet the French Command decided to serve Vichy and Germany, and, it has been suspected, safeguard their pensions. Free French and Australians met strong opposition. Soon hard fighting developed, and Wilson



SYRIAN OPERATIONS

had to engage in serious battles. In the air he found need for some of his best aircraft, as the French were using good American machines, supplied to them when they were Britain's allies, and now arriving in Syria from Tunisia, flown by way of Italy, and Rhodes. On one occasion, while escorting R.A.F. bombers over Eastern Syria, fighters of the Royal Australian Air Force gave the Germans and Russians of the Foreign Legion, who were defending Palmyra, a brief, drastic exhibition of air warfare. Six Glenn-Martin bombers with Vichy markings were sighted, some of the Australian escort broke away, sped down on them, and at the first attack shot all six down ablaze. As the invasion began the R.A.F. bombed the harbour and aerodromes in Rhodes to

delay Axis support, and on subsequent nights military objectives at Aleppo, Rhodes, Haifa, Palmyra, and Beirut harbour.

General Wilson's forces invaded Syria with horsed yeomanry, mechanized cavalry, and Australian infantry on the left, British and Australians in the centre, Transjordan Frontier Force, Indians, and Free French on the right. When the Indian and Transjordan forces had captured Deraa, Sheikh Meskine, and Esra the Free French took the lead towards Damascus. English troops had entered Kuneitra and Australians Merj Ayoun by June 11, and four days later Yeomanry and Australians took Sidon, after hard fighting in which the advance was aided by a landing by British infantry north of the Litani river. When nine Junkers attacked supporting British naval units off Sidon the R.A.A.F. drove them away, shooting down three and damaging others. Throughout the fighting the R.A.F. and R.A.A.F. were fully engaged raiding aerodromes, ports, and motor-transport, and protecting naval forces. But the Vichy French were fighting hard, and recaptured Esra, Merj Ayoun and Kuneitra, the last being quickly retaken by the Queens, Free French, and Transjordan Frontier Force.

While this progress was being made in the west and the east, heavy fighting was still proceeding in the centre at Merj Ayoun, a tough position which Wavell studied personally and which was not captured by the Australians until June 24. Meanwhile a mobile column of British cavalry, infantry, and yeomanry entered central Syria along the pipeline route from Iraq, advanced towards Palmyra and by this diversion helped British and French troops to enter Damascus on June 21. The forces advancing from Iraq were slowed down by many air attacks, but Palmyra fell after a stout fight on July 4 and gave General Wilson an important aerodrome. Towards the end of the campaign the British

Air Forces bombed all targets which might prolong resistance, including all the Vichy aerodromes and the shipping at Beirut. Neither side had large air forces, and Vichy's German friends soon abandoned them; but the British air-weapon was used with continuous force and economy throughout. The Australians in the coastal area now had to fight across a series of parallel valleys against a stubborn defence. The Navy supported them from the sea, driving off French destroyers which had been shelling their positions. After heavy fighting the Australians crossed the Damour river and moved towards Beirut, which fell in July 15. Northern Syria was also threatened by an Indian column from Iraq. With two great cities in Wilson's hands, and Aleppo in the north endangered, General Dentz abandoned the struggle.

The Vichy French had been completely out-manceuvred by clever tactics in the field, naval, and air co-operation, and the strategy of thrusts from south and east. Accustomed to the rapid advances in Poland, France, Cyrenaica, and Greece, the civilian public at home had regarded the Syrian campaign as slow, but in point of fact it had been concluded in five weeks, and with the minimum of casualties. By avoidance of bloody frontal assaults and full use of manœuvre, Wilson's forces had suffered only two thousand casualties, and had inflicted four times as many on their opponents. Any plans which the Germans had formulated against Egypt, Turkey, or Russia, with Syria as a base, were now frustrated. A further advantage accrued to Britain and Turkey from the direct contact now established through Syria. Moreover, Cyprus, which might have tempted Germany as a base in the Levant, could be more easily defended. After this campaign Britain had a continuous line of coast from the Turkish frontier almost to the limits of the Western Desert.

Britain sought nothing from these operations save protection for her strategic position in the Middle East, and proved

her political disinterestedness forthwith by giving the peoples of Syria and the Lebanon sovereign independence, while preserving the rights of France in Syria over those of other European nations. British consideration for the civil population during the fighting, and the liberal attitude after the victory, were not without effect on the peoples of the Middle East and the Arab world.

The bastions of Egypt were firmly held in the east, and Malta in the west had survived months of air attack. Reinforced by a variety of bombers, fighters, and Fleet Air Arm units, the island had made her presence felt over a wide area of the Central Mediterranean. Lying on the direct route from Sicily to Tripoli, the main Libyan port, Malta made Italian convoys take a detour as far as possible from her submarines and bombers, to creep along the French Tunisian coast into Tripoli. But this port was only an hour's flying from Malta, and the convoys were attacked both at sea and in harbour. The Benghazi-Tripoli road traffic was harassed, and Sicilian ports and aerodromes were attacked. Reconnaissance from Malta led to the first Mediterranean fleet action, when the Italians fled on contact with the Navy. Again, reconnaissance from Malta prepared the way for the Fleet Air Arm's triumph at Taranto. The Italians bombed Malta sporadically in the first months of war, but her worst ordeals began with the arrival of the Luftwaffe early in 1941. The first great air-battle over the island occurred when the damaged aircraft-carrier *Illustrious* put in for repair. On January 16 the Germans came over with one hundred dive-bombers, inflicting heavy damage on the dockyard and everything else in the neighbourhood except their target. The fighter strength of the island and its barrage went into action, and ten bombers were brought down. On the eighteenth and nineteenth the Germans came again, with the aerodromes as targets on the first day and the *Illustrious* on the second. Malta had seen nothing like this before, but

neither had the Germans, for the barrage and fighters put up such a furious resistance that the Luftwaffe tried no more. Of a force of 150 raiders used in these three days, fifty were destroyed by fighters and forty by anti-aircraft fire! After dark on January 23 the *Illustrious* slipped away from Malta, sufficiently repaired to sail to Alexandria.

Then the Italians with their less intensive and more discriminating methods reappeared, while the Luftwaffe supported operations in Cyrenaica, Greece, and Crete. Malta was placed in a more isolated position by the loss of Greece and Crete, as convoys of supplies from Egypt could no longer keep to the Cyrenaican coast for a long stage of their voyage, but had to run a 'bomb alley' as perilous as that from Gibraltar. Though short of supplies as the summer approached, the island's submarines and aircraft still hunted the convoys, bombed the ports of Libya, and took a continuous toll of air-raiders. Malta was to face its greatest ordeals in the next year, but in 1940 and 1941 it did everything possible to weaken the Axis efforts against Egypt. It has been said, by air strategists, that if Malta could have been removed, the Axis could have supplied Rommel to such an extent that Egypt would have fallen. The Allies owed much to the Governor and Commander-in-Chief, General Sir William Dobbie, who bore the responsibilities for defence and the welfare of the quarter of a million loyal, heroic people on an island in size only two-thirds of the Isle of Wight. Malta remained the stout bastion of Mediterranean and Middle East until the Anglo-American landings in French North Africa ended her ordeal. Then an Alexandria convoy reached the battered island, which to that time, November 1942, had taken a toll of Axis strength which is not yet fully assessed, though of aircraft alone Malta is believed to have accounted for at least one thousand. A second British convoy, planned to go in from Gibraltar, was diverted to North Africa, for politico-strategic reasons, or,

to be plainer, so that there should be no rioting, or trouble on the Anglo-American lines of communication. Malta had to go without the flour, potatoes, milk, coffee, tea, footwear, oil, and clothing which were part of the convoy's cargo. It was a pity that the Frenchwomen did not care for the sturdy British garments which would have clothed the thin, cold bodies of Maltese women and children that winter; but England lost no credit for the standard of her goods, as all the French in North Africa believed the supplies were provided by the United States!

On June 12, 1941, the Italians tried to emulate the Germans by attacking Malta with more weight and determination than was their custom. The Canadian fighter-pilot, Beurling, who made a great reputation over Malta, holds that the Italian fighter-pilot was more courageous than the German, and more inclined to stay and make a fight; but on this day, as on so many more, the enemy bombers and fighters met their superiors. Ten of the raiders were shot down by fighters and barrage, and the rest were pursued to their Sicilian aerodromes. The attack may have been made to celebrate the fall of Crete, to engage the garrison while some convoy was passing to Libya well out of sight, or to make the defences use material which would be now harder to replace. Malta showed that there was still plenty of fight left in the British, and Wavell demonstrated the fact again, two days later, when he struck where the Germans had built up great strength, on the frontier of Egypt.

The aim of the attack was to do as much damage as possible to the enemy between the frontier and Tobruk, and to delay the heavy assault which Rommel was preparing against that turbulent outpost. United Kingdom and Indian infantry, with tanks of the 7th Armoured Division, were employed under General Peirse. In this affair, no British tank mounted a gun heavier than the two-pounder, whereas the lightest German tank-gun was a 4½-pounder and the

heaviest a 14-pounder. This difference in gun-power had its effect, as it was to have again later in the year. In some stages of the battle, as the official account relates, it was a case of battleships against cruisers, with the Germans holding their lighter opponents at extreme range, and smashing them with little risk to themselves. After some initial success and skilful, stout-hearted fighting by infantry, tanks, and artillery, the British broke off the action. It was not a victory for either side, in the sense of an enemy routed or irreparable damage effected, but at least Rommel was left unable to profit by the British withdrawal, and Wavell's main object was achieved, in that the German commander was prevented from launching his drive against Tobruk. For months Rommel would hesitate to risk another 'show-down' with the tigerish garrison of Tobruk in its barren, stony lair, for he could not afford heavy losses in armour while the British were capable of clawing him so fiercely from Egypt. Even without fighting, much equipment intended for Rommel ended on the floor of the Mediterranean, through British air and naval action, during the summer of 1941. While the lively Tobruk area dominated German plans, and the war of patrols continued on the Egyptian frontier, the race of supplies continued. In the event, despite their long supply-routes, the British were ready for battle first, and were able to forestall Rommel's long-cherished ambition for a full-scale assault on Tobruk by five days, when Auchinleck launched an offensive into Cyrenaica in November. Meanwhile, on June 22, Germany had given the War a new and fateful direction by attacking Russia.

At the beginning of July Wavell exchanged posts with Auchinleck, going to India as Commander-in-Chief. To civilians this appointment came rather as a shock, for they could not be sure that it was not a 'demotion,' though any private soldier who had served in India knew that a huge project of military organization was being achieved there,

and that only a soldier of the first order could see it through. Soon, however, it became clearer that the Government had more in mind than the need to appoint one of its best generals to a task of organization and administration. In fact, such fine work had been done by his predecessor in developing the Indian Army that Wavell found the whole machine running smoothly and had no great creative work to do, although naturally in such a vast structure there were always developments and improvements to be made. The Government's real object in sending Wavell to India seemed to become more apparent as Germany's designs on the Caucasus emerged: but Churchill's foresight at last became obvious to all when in December Japan entered the war. Knowing that Japanese action was imminent, and that a desperate situation might well arise in the East, the clear choice for command in India was the man who had coped so dexterously and unflinchingly with crisis in the Middle East.

Before this situation developed, to justify completely the removal of a great general from an active theatre, the Regular Army in the Middle East appreciated the importance of the Indian Command; but had Wavell been sent to the South Pole, the Army would still have regarded the move as a promotion. In one of his lectures Wavell said that a general may succeed for a time in persuading his superiors that he is a good commander, but can never persuade his army, unless he has the real qualities of a commander. He had won the confidence and respect of the armies in the Middle East by his character, care for the men, sound preparation for brilliant campaigns, and solid achievement. Contact with him inspired self-confidence, and he was well-known by sight to the fighting men in the Western Desert, Eritrea, and Syria. "I always felt braver after the Chief had been to see us," said General O'Connor. Officers who had business with Wavell always left him with the solid faith that their affairs would be handled efficiently, that there

would be no 'slip-up' and that the Commander-in-Chief might well do more than he promised, if it was humanly possible. Under his command, an atmosphere of understanding, efficiency, and confidence was present everywhere. Senior officers did not indulge in impossible demands, and for that reason subordinates knew that the things demanded were practicable, and had to be executed with dispatch and precision. The desert forces, which in the beginning consisted of Regulars, were trained to act promptly and rightly on the word, were encouraged to think with boldness, initiative, and cunning, and knew always that they were being commanded with good sense, sympathy, and shrewdness. Everywhere, in the desert and elsewhere, the staffs and the troops felt the power of the directing mind. During Wavell's two years' command they developed more than a pride—an affection for the leader who showed foresight and bold shrewdness, and made the names of divisions which fought under his direction famous throughout the world. Yet his attitude to them was more formal than that of Montgomery to the Eighth Army, and he stood by his own axiom of refraining from speeches to the troops. Before the campaigns started he had been given just enough time to get to know his staffs and men, and they to appreciate him, whereas Montgomery had to gain the confidence of a larger, defeated army more quickly. Wavell did not explain to the troops just how he intended to "knock the enemy for six," for even had his temperament allowed this approach, in the circumstances of his time he could be less certain of his boundary shots. An army needs both types of personality among its commanders, and the French once possessed a man combining the attributes of both, in Napoleon.

The campaigns in the Middle East best illustrate one of the surprises of this war—the production, by Britain, of a string of great military planners and dashing field-commanders. Wavell, Alexander, Wilson, Montgomery, Gott, and

O'Connor are names which occur at once because they have been in the full glare of the arena; there are many others—Brooke, Dempsey, Leese, and commanders of armies, corps, and divisions, whose names will have equal fame when the history of European operations is written. Britain has proved equal to producing the modern field-commander, who must think quickly and react instinctively, like a boxer; and the nation that found the men to hold the Middle East and, with others, to achieve the invasion of Europe and the swift liberation of France and Belgium, does not lack the planners.

In addition to the respect and confidence which Wavell everywhere inspired, the front-line troops keenly appreciated his policy of bluff, or well-measured risks. It appealed to their sporting instincts, for they were always well aware in the first desert campaign of the disparity in British and Italian numbers and weight of equipment. Even the Australians, who expected little of British generals, and would have regarded a monocle almost as the hall-mark of a 'dud,' if it had not been worn to hide a wound, recognized in Wavell one worthy to lead any troops in the world, a commander of genius, and a man.

Wavell's thrust from the Western Desert, with a slender, meagrely equipped force, destroyed the pretensions to military power which the Fascists had tried to impose on the world. The years of boasting, sneers, and threats from the balcony of the Palazzo Venezia had ended in columns of prisoners, stretching from horizon to horizon of dust, scrub, sand, and stones. But perhaps the world now assessed the Italian soldier too lightly, as possibly did some of the later British commanders. It is true that the Italian lacked the stubbornness of Germans, yet there were occasions when he fought well, especially with artillery and tanks, and he was to be reckoned with when determinedly led. The columns of prisoners distract attention from the Italians who died, and the belief that Italians are intrinsically poor fighting

material cannot survive the recollection of their bloody assaults on the Isonzo or their amazing recovery after Caporetto, in the First World War; nor can it survive the witness of the thousands of Italian stock in the British and American armies and air forces. Those Italians reared in the malarial districts of Italy, with a history for generations of enfeebled blood and under-nourishment, could not be expected to act with vigour and enthusiasm, or to enjoy fighting British and Indian professionals or Australians. But there were many sturdy soldiers in the Italian armies, handicapped perhaps in those grim affairs by a volatile and individualistic temperament, but capable of heroism and great achievements under better leadership and direction. That so many surrendered was not necessarily owing to lack of faith in their cause, or even to the preference for sunlight and song over darkness and the grave, which is marked in Italians though shared by all soldiers. The large numbers of prisoners in Wavell's desert offensive was, in fact, basically due to the British methods, which created the conditions for surrender, and which were aided by the lack of vision of the Italian commanders. Under the conditions into which the Italians were forced, they had hardly an alternative but to cease fighting. Under similar conditions of surprise and disorganization, facing swift-moving and determined opponents, both Allied and German troops were later unable to resist.

Without knowledge of the political and other considerations which influenced his command, Wavell's record in the Middle East can be safely judged on known achievements. He was the first British general to employ the modern practices which had taken the Germans so rapidly through Poland and France. He adapted the new warfare to desert conditions, and showed how even small forces can be welded in action by land, sea, and air. While building up an incomparable small army he laid the foundations for the vast

future expansion. In saving Egypt, keystone of the British structure, he saved India, the southern Dominions, most probably Russia, and, indeed, it might be said, the whole anti-Axis cause; for it seems certain that had Egypt fallen there would never have been an invasion of Europe. How far-sighted was Churchill, in reinforcing the Middle East while the field-grey was in Calais and Paris, and the fight for survival was raging in the English skies! How vast Wavell's responsibilities, and how superbly sustained. The first to demonstrate in land fighting that the Axis was not invincible, Wavell gave fresh hope to the British Commonwealth, the occupied countries, and the neutrals, whose future as free peoples depended on Britain's survival. He showed America that Britain could do more than 'take it,' thus encouraging all those Americans who could see beyond the Atlantic shore.

When the war-correspondents visited Wavell's H.Q. to say good-bye he spoke to them of the year's events, and stressed the need for more equipment. Alexander Clifford wrote:

How ambiguous, how fantastically involved had been the problems before him. He had found the Middle East in a state of acute danger, and by precarious virtuosity and audacity . . . had at first won through. And then in the winter all these new problems had crowded in upon him with their contorted political angles. . . . The plain military threads of supplies and men and equipment . . . were knotted and tangled up with questions of politics, morale at home, and a dozen extraneous circumstances, which resulted in inadequate equipment and insufficient men.

Of all the correspondents, Alan Moorehead seems to have been the most fascinated by Wavell's personality. "I suddenly saw," he wrote of this meeting, "how sincere he was, how hard he had tried, fought, organized, argued, and held on. There went out of Cairo and the Middle East that afternoon one of the great men of the war."

When Wavell left the Middle East the enemy still lay on the western frontier of Egypt, but was no longer an immediate menace. Beyond Egypt the outer bastions in East Africa, Syria, Cyprus, and Iraq had been made safe. The Red Sea supply-route was assured, and was soon to pulse with Anglo-American activity. Wavell's plans and organization were rapidly developing and producing results for the future. The genesis of most of the factors, great and small, that affected the future campaigns can be traced to his period of command—even, to take but one small example, in the work of the Long Range Desert Group, finding the paths for Montgomery's armoured columns in Tripolitania in the last campaigns. If a great part of generalship, as he believed, lies in administration, then Wavell is again justified as a great commander, apart from his direction and planning of campaigns. The two rooms and the few huts which had formed G.H.Q. a year earlier were already the forgotten nucleus of a vast organization that was rapidly expanding. Where Wavell had thought in divisions, his successors by his efforts were enabled to handle armies. The desert, empty when Wavell came to Egypt, was beginning to seethe with a restless activity. West of the Delta, where only the black road and the thin line of railway had run, there were appearing supply-dumps, tank-depots, aircraft and aerodromes, artillery-parks, pipe-lines for water and petrol, reservoirs, water-points, fleets of lorries, railway sidings, camps, and a great army of men. Everywhere there had developed an immense organization and a throbbing power. Already the day of adventurous Davids had passed. Henceforth only the mailed Goliaths could stride to battle through the wilderness with awe-inspiring clamour.

CHAPTER X

INDIA

Supplies for Russia—Axis agents—Persian campaign—Air strength in Wavell's campaigns—Japanese in Indo-China—United States and Britain attacked—Malaya invaded—Wavell's Command—Singapore—Burma retreat—Japanese expansion—Time gained—The tide turns—Coral Sea and Midway—Raid into Arakan—Wingate—Military and industrial developments in India—Ad Portas reception—Bengal famine—S.E.A.C.—Japanese defeats at Kohima and Imphal—Fourteenth Army—Supplies to China—Advance towards Mandalay—The Viceroy

IN the summer of 1941 Britain and America could supply Russia by two routes. One of these, by the Atlantic and the White Sea to Murmansk and Archangel, facing German sea and air action based on Norway and Finland, needed strong protection and might well prove costly in shipping. The other, by the Pacific to Vladivostok, involved too much rail-transport inside Russia and could be cut if Japan entered the war. Britain, therefore, sought a third channel for supplies to Russia, through Persia.

Here, as in Iraq and Syria, the Axis had been active. The Shah was pro-Axis, an influential minority was in sympathy with Nazi doctrines, German technicians held key-posts in transport and industry, and the country was planted with large numbers of Axis military and political agents. German plans in Iraq and Syria had been frustrated, but in Persia there remained the danger of sabotage of oil-sources and of the supply-line which Britain intended to develop. Thus, when the Persian Government failed to comply with a request to remove the Axis agents Britain took swift military action. This campaign, planned in co-operation with the Russians, was Wavell's first task as Commander-in-Chief in

India. The commander in the field was Lieutenant-General E. P. Quinan.

The Russians entered Persia from the north, British and Indian forces from the south and west, while the R.A.F. dropped leaflets over Teheran and other cities, explaining the reasons for the invasion and disclaiming any hostility towards the people or designs on the country's independence. These reassurances would be readily acceptable, as most Persians for at least fifty years have regarded the name of England as synonymous with liberty and fair dealing. Persia had a numerically considerable army, but the soldiery, who when paid received 1s. 8d. a month from the treasury of the wealthy dictator Shah, showed little disposition to resist; nor would fighting have availed for long against the speed and precision of the advance by infantry, tanks, and armoured cars. The Anglo-Persian Oil Company's centres were quickly occupied, and in six days the British and Russian forces joined hands. Then, after negotiations with the Persian Government, the Shah abdicated in favour of his son, the Legations of the Axis and its satellites—Rumania and Hungary—were closed, and enemy agents were removed. By a treaty with Persia, Britain and Russia guaranteed the independence and defence of the country.

The new supply-route was now safe, but had to be greatly developed. The main channel of supply was by rail from the Persian Gulf to the Caspian Sea, but there were subsidiary routes from Iraq and India. For instance, a railway from Iraq reached the Persian frontier, whence there was a road to Teheran; a road from Mosul ran to Tabriz, which was connected by rail to the Russian system; and a line from India ran to Duzdab in Persia, whence there were road connexions with the west and north. Development of these communications was begun, so that every available route could be employed to supply Russia, from the Gulf, Iraq, and India. Anglo-American projects took shape in the

Gulf, where deep-water berths had to be constructed, the production of aviation spirit at Abadan increased, new docks built, cranes, railway locomotives, wagons, railway-tracks, and lorries supplied, and repair- and maintenance-shops erected. British and Russians divided the country into north and south zones for the handling of supplies. In the following months Russia was fed with war-material on a steadily growing scale through Persia. This approach was particularly valuable in the supply of British and American aircraft, which formerly had been sent crated or as deck-cargo through the dangerous northern waters. Henceforth bombers, and later fighters, could be flown from India, using Persian airfields as stages, or from West Africa, over territory controlled by the Allies, through Egypt, Iraq, Syria, and Persia to Russia. Control of this supply-route was an important factor in Russia's resistance and subsequent victories.

By the end of 1941, hundreds of aircraft were being sent by Britain to Russia. Britain's supply of aircraft was still inadequate to her own needs but less tenuous than during the months of Wavell's campaigns. It has been noted that the Italians in the Western Desert were superior, for most of 1940, in both numbers and quality of aircraft. In the main Egyptian theatre in June Wavell had, in fact, only 64 fighters and 94 bombers; all these aircraft were obsolete or obsolescent and some air transports were flown as bombers. The Italians had 200 fighters and 200 bombers, all modern. The R.A.F. therefore used the same tactics as the land forces, practising a bold bluff. Many missions by single aircraft were flown from different airfields, to give the impression of numbers and to disperse the enemy fighter strength. One Hurricane, which arrived in August 1940, took off several times a day from different airfields, and much publicity material was provided for the Egyptian Press, extolling the powers of "the Hurricanes"! When his first offensive

began, Wavell had 65 fighters, but this force was more formidable, as half of the aircraft were Hurricanes. In the Sudan and Eritrea again, the R.A.F. was outnumbered, for Wavell's 85 bombers and the sprinkling of South African and Rhodesian fighters, were only about one-half of the Italian numbers, and the enemy aircraft were modern. Platt began his advance with three squadrons of bombers (Wellesleys), a South African squadron with some Hurricanes, a flight of Gladiators sent from Egypt and a Rhodesian army co-operation squadron. At that date the Italians had 200 aircraft on this front. Cunningham, in the south, had 94 aircraft against 88 Italian, but the enemy's machines were modern, whereas the six squadrons of South African Air Force were equipped with various old British types, had some German-built transports from the Union converted into bombers, and only a few Hurricanes. With this scratch force they attained air supremacy, destroying 10 Italian aircraft at the opening of the Juba fighting, 20 on Dire-dawa airfields and 32 at Addis Ababa. During the advance Cunningham was reinforced by some aircraft from Aden. In Africa, therefore, Wavell had been in a distinct inferiority in the air. But it was in the Greek and Cretan fighting that the inadequacy of his air strength was most apparent.

The first air support sent to Greece consisted of two squadrons of medium bombers, one of Gladiators, and one of mixed Blenheim fighters and bombers. Bombers from Malta helped the Greeks by attacking Albanian and Apulian bases; heavy bombers occasionally carried out missions from Egypt, and the Fleet Air Arm co-operated to support Greek resistance. When the Germans intervened the R.A.F. had only 80 aircraft serviceable against 800 German and 310 Italian! Moreover, the Germans had a carefully prepared base and supply system for air operations and could reinforce easily. There was little with which to reinforce the R.A.F., though during the campaign some aircraft were, in fact, sent

from the Western Desert, despite the German counter-stroke there. Yet without adequate anti-aircraft defence for their few available airfields, lacking a developed radio-location system, and though the Greek observer system at length failed, the R.A.F. in six months brought down 259 enemy aircraft and scored 99 'probables' for the loss in combat of 77 and 55 destroyed on the ground. In the whole Greek war the R.A.F. lost 209 machines, including those abandoned in the evacuation.

To open their operations against Crete, the Germans had 180 fighters, 300 bombers, and 600 aircraft for towing gliders, carrying troops and dropping parachutists. On Crete were 12 Blenheim fighters, 12 Gladiators, six Fleet Air Arm machines, and 12 Hurricanes! Useless against German fighters, the Blenheims were sent back to Egypt, whence ten Hurricanes were sent as reinforcement. This tiny air group, in six days, though outnumbered by from seven to ten to one, destroyed 23 German aircraft, scored nine 'probables' and 41 'damaged,' before the last three Gladiators and four Hurricanes were withdrawn on May 19. In Syria Wavell employed one bomber squadron and three of fighters against the 92 French aircraft—a number which was quickly reinforced to 159. In five weeks the British and Dominion air squadrons destroyed four-fifths of the opposing force, for the loss of 12 aircraft.

Only on one occasion, in all these campaigns, were British land forces almost completely unmolested from the air. In Wavell's attack of June 1941, in the Western Desert, the air forces closely supported the troops and gave considerable assistance at one point to the Indians. The Germans hardly appeared in the air, possibly owing to a shortage of petrol. Wavell's skill in the deployment of his troops and supplies in the Middle East has been noted. Equal craft, timing, and economy was employed in the use of his mainly obsolescent and always exiguous air forces. As has been shown, Wavell

was convinced of the vital role of the air weapon to the extent that it was immaterial to him whether an Army or Air Force commander directed operations, and indeed an air officer, Air Vice-Marshal Reid, commanded in the recovery of Berbera. But Wavell never had the chance of demonstrating what could be done with a really powerful air weapon. Much was done, however, with slender resources, and Wavell believed that the Italian failure to take opportunities in 1940 was due in the first place to the British air forces, who though outnumbered, everywhere took and held the initiative, under the great leadership of such commanders as Longmore, Collishaw, Slatter, and Tedder. Wavell was fortunate with his air, as with his field, commanders, who kept the Regia Aeronautica guessing and on the defensive. Perhaps the outstanding example of Italian failure in the air is provided by the Red Sea supply route. This ran for five hundred miles within range of Italian airfields in Eritrea, and was protected only by a few fighters from Aden and Perim and patrols from Port Sudan—yet British ships were only twice damaged by air attack!

Wavell was to fight one more campaign, against the Japanese, with inadequate air support, but by that time Britain's initial handicaps in the air were being overcome, and the East was short of aircraft partly because Russia was being supplied. Despite the loss of vast resources in raw materials of the East, it was vital to keep Russia on her feet as she reeled back under the first German blows, and the supplies of aircraft, boots, clothing, industrial and other equipment began to move through Persia.

The campaign which opened the way for this close Anglo-Russian collaboration may also have results, beyond the present hostilities, for the good of Europe—or for evil if the collaboration is broken. Friendly relations between Britain and Russia after 1815 gave Europe more than a generation

of peace before the co-operation was ended—mainly by British suspicion of Russian designs on the Straits connecting the Black Sea and Mediterranean. After the Crimean War Russia left the Western Powers to solve their own problems, while the Prussians defeated Austria and France, establishing the might which has been used to launch two devastating wars in one generation. An opportunity for Anglo-Russian co-operation arose again, before the first of these wars, when Britain and Russia acquired spheres of influence in Persia. Now the chance has arrived once more, but Persia is so important to both nations that there are elements of danger. Britain needs the oil of Persia and naval power in the Gulf, and must regard Persia from the viewpoint of India's security; while Persia provides for Russia an outlet to the world's oceans and a barrier on the rear of her main oilfields and industrial areas. Friction in this sensitive region might lead to a quarrel. The situation has been aptly expressed by the *Manchester Guardian*: "Anglo-Soviet co-operation is the key to European peace and Persia is the key to Anglo-Soviet co-operation." The conditions established by Wavell's Persian campaign will inevitably react on the course of future European history, and mutual restraint should give security to the two nations and Europe. Poland, when freed, may prove another test.

If the Axis aim in overwhelming Greece and Crete was to win bases for a drive beyond the Levant and Middle East it had been wholly thwarted by Wavell's prompt counter-measures. The arrival of the reinforcements at Basra seems to have forced the creatures of the Axis into premature action, so that with minimum forces Wavell was able to seize control of the whole region from the Mediterranean to India. Germany seems to have realized from the beginning the hopelessness of trying to sustain the fire when Wavell had smothered the first flames, for little assistance was given to the Iraqis, the French in Syria, or the Shah of Persia.

Wavell had succeeded in putting a guard on the gate to Russia and in consolidating Britain's whole strategic position between Egypt and India before the next storm broke.

In July 1941 the Vichy Government granted Japan freedom to use and develop air and naval bases in French Indo-China, thus opening the way for Japan to attack Malaya, Burma, and all the British and Dutch possessions from Hong Kong to Sumatra. At one step, without fighting, forward positions were acquired, more than two thousand miles distant from Japan and only three hundred miles away from Malaya. One giant stride brought the Japanese within striking-range of territories rich in coveted raw materials. To utilize her improved position Japan needed only sea supremacy, and with Britain at war with Germany and Italy, the rival sea-power in the East was that of the United States. So, on December 7, 1941, by a surprise air-attack on the American naval base at Pearl Harbour, the Japanese altered the whole naval balance in the Pacific and eastern Asia. Advantage was speedily taken of this success, and the Japanese were already landing in northern Malaya and Thailand when they sank, by air-attack, H.M.S. *Prince of Wales* and H.M.S. *Repulse*, off the Malayan coast. With command of the sea, and superiority in numbers on land and in the air, the Japanese then steadily progressed down the Malayan peninsula. By landing behind the defenders at successive stages, they forced a continuous withdrawal on the British, Australian, and Indian defenders, who were constantly out-flanked, and threatened across their lines of communication. The enemy advance overran aerodromes, which they used at once for support of the land forces and bombing the British back-areas as far as Singapore.

Before war began Wavell had visited Malaya and Burma to see the Indian troops, and found that there was a "sense of unreality" about preparations for war. No one really

expected a Japanese attack, and keen officers, he noted, were only anxious to get away to an active theatre! Then, as the Japanese menace rapidly developed, Wavell was chosen by the British, Dominion, United States, and Netherlands Governments as Supreme Commander in the South-west Pacific. In January and February 1942 he commanded the Allied forces in that area, with H.Q. in Java. Already the enemy were threatening Kuala Lumpur, more than half-way down the peninsula, after landing from the sea at Kota Bahru, where the Indians resisted magnificently but vainly, against heavy odds. By the end of the month the enemy had covered some 350 miles from their first landings, and British forces were crossing the Straits of Johore into Singapore.

There were some seventy thousand troops on the Island, but they were not the garrison of a fortress intended to meet attack from the mainland. Indeed, with a huge population and a marshy soil which forbade the construction of deep shelters and modern underground fortifications, Singapore was less capable of standing a siege than Hong Kong. Moreover, many of the troops were worn out with fighting a fast-moving adversary, specially trained for jungle warfare, who made the most of the tactical advantage provided by control of the coasts, and was supported by an air-weapon that became increasingly more effective as British air support grew weaker through loss of aerodromes and lack of aircraft. In addition, some of the troops recently landed at Singapore were physically unfit for fighting in the Malayan climate and terrain after the long journey from England. With a larger artillery, and air observation, which the British now lacked, the Japanese confidently began their assault across the mile-wide, thirty-mile-long Straits. Meanwhile they shelled, bombed, and machine-gunned targets on the island almost at will. The creeks and thick cultivation on each side of the Straits helped them to concentrate for the crossings, and

when these were made, favoured their infiltration through the defending troops. Superior air- and gun-power enabled them to hold the initiative and repair and cross the damaged Causeway connecting the island to the mainland. Within a day of their first landings the Japanese captured an airfield five miles inland, and a few days later they occupied the reservoirs which supplied water for a million people in Singapore city. The British had only one almost unusable aerodrome, and on February 15 Singapore fell.

In Burma also the Japanese had advanced steadily. In January and February they crossed the Salween and Sittang rivers. Rangoon was occupied early in March, and by the end of the month the Japanese were striking west across the Irrawaddy and pushing on towards Prome and Mandalay. At first the R.A.F. and the American Volunteer Group in the service of China took a heavy count of Japanese aircraft, but as the enemy's land forces thrust on through the jungles, aerodromes were lost, and the remaining airfields had to bear the full weight of the Japanese attack, so that they could not service even the very moderate forces which the British had available. Bold, successful strikes were made by the R.A.F., but were never heavy or frequent enough to halt the enemy on the ground. As in Malaya, the weight of the air-attack became stronger as the Japanese won more air-fields. Lashio, terminal of the Burma Road which had carried aid to China, Mandalay, and Akyab were captured in April, and when the rains of the south-west monsoon arrived the British and Indian forces had been driven into wild districts of Assam and Eastern Bengal, a country of jungle and mountain ranges without rail and road communications.

While this fighting was in progress in Malaya and Burma, the Japanese were also striking out against a great arc of British, American, and Dutch territory. To name all the places attacked or occupied would be almost to make an atlas-index of these possessions, from the Bay of Bengal to

the South China Sea and mid-Pacific. Guam, Wake, and Hong Kong were captured in December; Borneo, various points in the Dutch East Indies, the Solomon Islands, Rabaul, in New Britain, and Lae, in New Guinea, were all attacked in January; in the Philippines, Manila was captured, though Bataan resisted heroically till May; Amboyna, Palembang, in Sumatra, and Koepang, in Dutch Timor, were occupied. The Japanese arrived within 450 miles of Australia and began air-raids on Darwin. March brought the capture of Batavia, capital of Java, and the occupation of the Andaman Islands.

Wavell's H.Q. in January and February 1942 were in Java. During this brief Command of the Allied forces he visited the war-fronts to see events for himself, but there was not the slightest hope of expelling the Japanese, for it was the plain fact that compared to the main forces employed by the Japanese, Britain was fighting with what were little more than outpost or garrison forces, sea, land, and air. As against the forward enemy bases in Indo-China, Thailand, and other Japanese-occupied territories, the British lines of supply stretched for thousands of miles. Japan could replace her losses quickly and add weight to the offensive up to the point where the advance towards India and Australia reached areas of poor communications and vast distances from her main bases. British and American replacements of men, naval units, aircraft, and supplies would take months to reach the scenes of action in adequate strength. For months, therefore, the task would be to halt and hold the enemy. Wavell could only inspire, and make dispositions for, the fight for time—a task to which he was not unaccustomed—and use the forces still left to him to delay the enemy and damage him as much as possible. Here, again, a skilful economy was demanded, so that every blow should weaken the enemy, until Britain and America could rally. There were, however, some bright moments in the gloom, as when

Ceylon was reinforced by aircraft in time to beat off Japanese air attack and be saved, and when Madagascar was occupied before Vichy could allow the enemy to seize it and establish air and naval bases on the Cape route to the Middle East and India.

Visiting the Burma front by air, Wavell brought high encouragement to the men fighting a great defensive campaign, and in the darkest months gave confidence to all who met him. American generals, who knew the full extent of the disasters and all their implications, felt that the Allies had a great commander, a man who could measure the calamitous situation accurately and coldly, without panic or despair. "Wavell," said one American commander, "is the greatest general I've ever met." In those months of command in the South-west Pacific, and later in India, Wavell saved all that could be saved, was responsible for the fighting retreat, and enabled Britain to keep a foothold in the East, so that in the course of time she could come back fighting.

There were tactical, supply, and strategic reasons for the British withdrawals in the field, but the basic cause of the loss of territory and defeats which shocked the British people, was the casual, pacific outlook of the nation in the years between the wars. A people with a vast empire- and world-trade, which neglected its armaments while others who coveted its vast possessions were not only both openly and vociferously preparing for conquest but also already waging war upon their weaker neighbours, could not reasonably expect any other outcome but defeat, loss, and humiliation. In Malaya the Japanese had acquired Britain's great naval base, one-half of the world's rubber supply, a quarter of the world's tin, and sources of manganese, copper, and tungsten. With the Dutch East Indies, Burma, and their conquests elsewhere, they won more oil and oil-refineries, cotton, coal, copper, lead, zinc, gold, silver,

timber, and sources of food suitable to Orientals in greater measure than they had ever known in Japan. With such a wealth of resources behind an efficient army, world opinion expected the Japanese to enter India on the heels of the retreating British. But the fighting retreats, increasing difficulties of communications, the skilful disposition of the British and American forces, and the time needed to bring the weight of the newly acquired resources into play, put a limit to Japanese expansion. Time was gained for the Anglo-American recovery. Much had to be achieved, however, before anything more than holding the Japanese could be envisaged. Britain and America had slowly to recover sea-power, by building aircraft-carriers, battleships, and large numbers of cruisers and destroyers, at a time when the Royal Navy was fully extended in the Western war and British shipyards and industry were straining to replace losses of merchant shipping. The key to Japan's defeat lay in sea supremacy, which would enable Britain and America to cut the enemy sea-communications to the wide-flung perimeter of her conquests, and this supremacy could only be gained by building up air strength, land-based and seaborne. Japan was at once joined by Germany and Italy in her war on the United States, and it was clear that it would be long before she need fear a great Anglo-American offensive. Yet even in the full tide of victory, the Japanese Command must have felt that in attacking Britain, America, and the Netherlands together, it had engaged beyond its weight, for in the summer of 1942 there was no sign of weakening resolve from the British in India, and in the Pacific in May and June the limits of Japan's success were indicated by the American victories of the Coral Sea and Midway. Six months later the Japanese on the Indian frontier were experiencing something, though it was as yet only the vanguard, of Anglo-American power; for by January 1943 British and American air forces were striking in considerable

strength over the river lines of supply in Arakan, over the Irrawaddy and at Mandalay and the railways. In the winter of 1942-43 Wavell sent forces by land into Arakan, being unable to attack the area from the sea owing to shortage of shipping and landing-craft. A part of these forces were not fully trained in jungle-warfare, and met a very experienced Japanese division. The strategic objectives which it was hoped to win by this surprise move could not be held, but the campaign dislocated Japanese plans for an invasion of the outlying Indian provinces, and valuable experience was gained. As the year advanced, British and Americans employed increasingly in Burma the weapon that could do most damage quickly and economically—bombing the port of Rangoon, smashing the main bridge over the Irrawaddy, and driving enemy raiders and fighters from the skies with slight losses to themselves. Wingate, Wavell's choice for unorthodox warfare, led a force, supplied by air, through hundreds of miles of the world's worst country, destroying rail-communications and for months engaging the attention of large enemy forces. Meanwhile, at the other end of the widely extended fronts, facing Australia, Japan's advance was halted, and the long process of forcing the enemy back was begun.

II

As Commander-in-Chief in India, Wavell was responsible for the direction of operations in Burma, which gradually became more promising. At the same time he was developing the Indian Army. Many difficulties were encountered in expanding an army of under 200,000 to nearly 2,000,000, under the pressure of war conditions, and especially the difficulty of language. But he was quite certain that when the time for the great counter-offensive arrived, the Indian soldier would not be found wanting.

In 1939 the Army in India numbered some 50,000 British and 180,000 Indians. All these were professional soldiers, whose main duties were the defence of the North-West Frontier and police service. There was an Officers' Training School at Dehra Dun, and officers were also trained at Sandhurst. Just before the war additional training centres and the mechanization of the Indian Army were being planned, and organization and development were well advanced when Wavell reached India. Men of lower physical standard were being recruited and built up with good food, medical care and physical exercises. Nearly one-half of the new officers were Indian. Instruction was given in all the technical branches, and by the end of 1942 the Army contained thousands of mechanics, drivers, armourers, signallers, and wireless operators. Losses among Indian troops were heavy, particularly in Malaya, yet the gaps in the ranks of officers and N.C.O's were filled, and the growing volunteer army was trained both for open armoured warfare and jungle fighting. It was no slight achievement that while this expansion and training was in progress, the Indian Army maintained divisions in North Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. By the end of 1943 half a million Indian troops had served out of India, in France, Libya, Abyssinia, Italian East Africa, Palestine, Syria, Iraq, Persia, Hong Kong, Malaya, Burma, Borneo, Aden, and Tunisia. Wavell has said that the Middle East could not have been held without the Indians. The Royal Indian Navy had been so greatly expanded, so that for every hundred men in 1939 there were a thousand in 1943. Commissions are open to Indians and the personnel is trained in gunnery, torpedoes, mine-sweeping, anti-submarine technique, and the protection of convoys. The Indian Navy helped to evacuate large numbers of troops during the retreat in Burma, has supported the Royal Navy in the Mediterranean, and will play a part in the coming onslaught on Japan. As this Eastern war involves a great

gathering and sea-transport of supplies, one may recall also that Indian merchant seamen serve in British ships everywhere in the world. In 1939 the Indian Air Force consisted of one squadron, but it has now many units, with an increasing number of aerodromes, training centres, and large maintenance depots. Wavell has seen his own, and his predecessor's organization and planning achieve magnificent results. Moreover, India has saved labour in Europe, and shipping, by developing her own resources and industries. In the North African campaigns, boots, clothing, steel, railway wagons, tents, ground-sheets, and webbing equipment were among the supplies sent by India. India provided equipment and staffs for the Persian supply-route to Russia. Technicians from Britain and America have accelerated India's industrial production, so that the country now produces such commodities as tool steel, stainless steel, machine-tools, shells, automatic weapons, guns, ammunition, explosives, armoured vehicles, gun-carriages, component parts for aircraft, surgical instruments, and medical stores. In cotton goods India can produce for herself, China, and the Middle East, and in woollens can provide blankets for armies of millions. Camouflage netting and canvas from India are used in all the war theatres. Industrial training-centres produce thousands of skilled and semi-skilled workers, and others are trained in England. Pig-iron, coal, manganese, motor-tyres, mica, oil-seeds, and timber are used in the country's industries or exported. The States and Provinces of India have also contributed to war funds, providing money, for instance, for a score of R.A.F. squadrons. To-day India is the main supply-centre and depot for the war in the East.

By the summer of 1943 the Japanese were still at the gates of India, but the situation was transformed. In the Pacific air and sea supremacy were no longer theirs, and on the Burmese frontier Britain was not only 'hitting back

aggressively but was also on the eve of meeting the enemy victoriously in the greatest land-battles which Japan had yet had to fight since her aggression began.

Raised to the peerage in 1943, Field-Marshal the Viscount Wavell of Cyrenaica and Winchester took as supporters in his armorial bearings a soldier of the Black Watch and a Scholar of Winchester. As Viceroy-designate of India he was honoured by the Freedom of Winchester and on September 25 by an *Ad Portas* reception at the College, a reception given only to the most distinguished visitors and each incoming Bishop of Winchester, in the presence of the Warden, the Headmaster, and the assembled school. The boys stood, hats in hand, in deep attention, while Wavell spoke in Latin, in reply to the Latin address by the Prefect of Hall. He recalled his family's age-old connexion with the College, and said that although Winchester had never especially esteemed soldiers, an old fellow-pupil of his time, Lord Dowding, had directed the air-defence of Britain against Hitler's thunderbolts, and that when justice, loyalty, and duty demanded it, Wykehamists had always fought bravely. Now, he told the assembly, he was giving up his military life for a civil task, one of great difficulty, in which many of his assistants would be Wykehamists, and hoped that in meeting these great duties he would have their goodwill.

Returning to India as Viceroy and Governor-General in October, Wavell was at once confronted by a famine situation in Bengal. In August 1942 Indian crops were poor, and in October there were damaging cyclones, followed in the spring of 1943 by devastating floods. In addition, the war denied India the crops of Burma, and all Indian communications were overtaxed by war-transport. Such were some of the reasons for the famine. Thousands were dying from starvation and the resultant diseases. It was a fearful re-appearance of the peril which always haunts India, and is

usually caused by the failure of rain. The British have done much to meet the periodic danger, by irrigation works, the development of railways, and the organization of relief measures. The Viceroy now visited the worst districts, at once ordered all the Army's means of transport into action to bring food, and then tackled the problem on broader lines of price control and rationing. The famine passed, and the long-term planning and preparations developed by Wavell as Commander-in-Chief began to show more spectacular results.

General Auchinleck had succeeded Lord Wavell, resuming his former duties as Commander-in-Chief in India, and in November 1943 South East Asia Command took over the direction of the war from India Command, an indication that the stage of preparation was passing to one of large-scale action. Thereupon the Japanese began to double their garrison in Burma! In the next year stories of appalling hardships and superb courage began to emerge from Assam and the Burmese jungles. Indeed, by contrast with the deeds of this army facing Burma, the heroism of other theatres of war began to appear almost pallid. While the Americans in the Pacific were wrestling with the enemy, and edging forward to positions for a great offensive, British forces met an army of one hundred thousand Japanese who invaded Manipur province in March 1944. Five enemy divisions were annihilated, and the rest decimated and scattered. Courage and endurance no longer marked a trail of retreat, but pointed towards victory. At Kohima, 3,500 men, half of them brought out of hospital to go into the line, withstood a complete Japanese division for a fortnight until reinforcements came. Fighting in the jungles was prolonged, but everywhere the Japanese were foiled and smashed. When Wavell visited the battlefield in the summer he was able to tell the 2nd Division, which he had once commanded in England, that the enemy had received "a terrific crack,"

suffering a tremendous defeat, and a damaging blow to morale. His son, Major the Hon. A. J. Wavell, was severely wounded in the fighting, and lost his left hand. In the battles of 1944 the Japanese were engaged on more even terms than at any former time, in fighting on a large scale. They came forward confident in their invincibility, and fought like madmen, but they could not storm Kohima or Imphal. Thousands were killed even as they tried to disengage, and thousands died of hunger, thirst, and disease as they retired. They had met men who were now by far their superiors in jungle-fighting, and who, moreover, would sooner die fighting than die slowly as prisoners under the brutal treatment of the pagans. Bewildered and humiliated by the defeat, unable to cope with the supply problem in the terrible country, the Japanese retreat to the Chindwin was a route of death and despair. By 1944 the British had the men, supplies, improved communications, and good air support. In the autumn the Fourteenth Army numbered 750,000 of whom 125,000 were European and the remainder Indian, Gurkha, East and West African, and other units. For this arena Britain had again produced great field-commanders—Alexander in the retreat and Slim, of the Fourteenth Army, who out-manceuvred and out-fought the savage, fanatical enemy in jungle and mountain. From the air the British and Americans could heavily attack the enemy's ports, rail, river, road, and track communications, and land and supply divisions fully equipped for battle (and for constructing landing-grounds) behind the Japanese front. Fighter supremacy was established, and air transport carried the wounded from the jungles and brought in comforts, including S.E.A.C.'s own newspaper, in addition to essential supplies. In the face of great hazards and almost insuperable difficulties of nature, the stream of supplies for China was never allowed to cease, even when it was only a trickle of petrol, flown from Assam to China over great

mountain ranges, until a pipe-line was laid from Chittagong across jungle and over the mountain barriers, through isolated pumping-stations which had to be supplied by air. Wavell flew to Chunking to visit Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek and also received the Chinese leader in India. Through these personal contacts the two soldiers established a firm understanding. In November 1944 Chinese troops were fighting in co-operation with the British Imperial army, but this time in an offensive. They were advancing from Myitkyina towards the Irrawaddy river-port of Bhamo, while the British 36th Division from Mogaung and the Fourteenth Army from Tiddim, were pushing towards the convergence of the rivers Chindwin and Irrawaddy, Mandalay, and the railway to Rangoon. By that month one-third of Burmese territory had been reconquered. The monsoon was over, and with increasing Allied power in guns and aircraft, and one army thrown back and mauled to death, the Japanese Command must have seen the portents of another kind of storm.

During the long months of preparation only the high lights of the fighting, such as Wingate's raid, were visible to the British nation from the darkness of the jungle, and more attention was paid to political events in India. Nothing is said here of the Indian political situation, for the author believes that general statements cannot usefully be made, without a very close knowledge of a problem so complicated.

For Wavell to relinquish military command for a civil appointment, during a great war, and while Britain and America were preparing for the counter-offensive against Japan, must have been a painful decision. We do not know the reasons which impelled him, but he must have been convinced that, at the stage events had reached, he could serve Britain and India better as Viceroy than as Commander-in-Chief. The British Government's view, however,

in offering this highest appointment in the East, may be easily conjectured. In Wavell it had a man with no political past, one above intrigue and faction, courageous, accustomed to clear thinking as to the desirable objectives and determination to reach them, and with immense prestige throughout the world as a soldier and man of honour.

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APPENDIX

MAIN EVENTS, JUNE 1940—JUNE 1941

	LIBYA	E. AFRICA	EUROPE	OTHER THEATRES
June 1940	Patrols and raids into Libya	Patrols active on Sudan frontier	France capitulates	French in Syria and North Africa cease collaboration with Middle East Command
July	"	"	Battle of Britain, followed by night raids	"
August	"	Invasion of British Somaliland	"	"
September	Graziani at Sidi Barrani	"	Italy attacks Greece	"
October	"	British attack at Gallabat	"	"
November	"	Invasion of Eritrea	Night raids on Britain	"
December	Wavell attacks at Sidi Barrani	Cunningham crosses the Juba	"	"
January 1941	Bardia, Tobruk, Derna, captured	British Somaliland recovered	British in Greece	"
February	Benghazi, El Aghela, reached	Fall of Keren	Matapan	"
March	Rommel approaches Cyrenaica	Addis Ababa occupied	Night raids on Britain	"
April	Rommel recovers Cyrenaica	"	British evacuate Greece	"
May	Wavell attacks on Egyptian frontier	Aosta surrenders	Loss of Crete	Iraqis attack Habbaniyah. British restore the Regent
June	Wavell attacks again at Sollum	"	"	British enter Syria. Damascus captured. Germany attacks Russia

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